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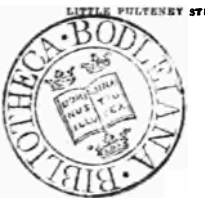

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THE

MILLIONAIRE OF MINCING LANE.

CHAPTER I.

THE RICHEST HEIRESS IN ENGLAND.

THAT distinguishing feature of the street-architecture of Paris—the *porte cochère*—has its prototype still in the City of London, though it is almost as seldom met with now as the pointed gable, the latticed window, or the overhanging story of a much earlier period.

The reason for this is not far to seek.

The wealthy merchant who used to combine his business and his pleasure all beneath one roof, who housed his clerks and his family within the same walls, has long since emigrated beyond the suburbs; and the family mansion, cut up into countless offices, has lost all its outward signs, the old gateway having either given place to half a dozen narrow entrances with a host of names upon each door-post, or, where it yet remains, being blocked up by an apple-stall, whose owner is never disturbed by the apparition of the family coach.

Such is the case, for the most part, in that region of the City where, though they dwell in the country, the merchants of London continue, for business purpose

most to congregate. But exceptions to the rule may yet be found, and here and there the curious seeker may stumble, even at the present hour, upon a genuine *porte cochère*.

At the time to which the opening of this narrative refers, in one of the most frequented thoroughfares, barely five minutes' walk from the Bank of England, might be seen a gateway of this description. More ornamented, however, than those which admit to the generality of the Paris hotels, for the large single door which, during the daytime, always stood open—swung back close to the wall—was carved with flowers and foliage in a most elaborate manner. This external embellishment might be looked upon as quite accidental, the simplest style of architecture characterising the building over the gateway, as well as the range within. Beyond the entrance was an oblong court, paved like the street, on either side of which were business and domestic offices, and at the further extremity of the court stood the dwelling-house to which it formed the approach. It was of dark brick, wide-fronted and many-windowed, the windows being disproportionately high and narrow, with a facing of bricks round them of brighter hue, as if the eyes of the house were red with weeping, enforced by the solitude to which it was condemned in the midst of an outer world of so much life and movement. So solitary seemed the place, from this contrast, that a casual passer-by, unversed in the ways of the great city, would never have dreamt that more business was transacted in those quiet offices, and that larger sums were daily entered in the books made up there, than in any two, or even three, of the leading mercantile establishments of London.

But it is the dwelling-house that, at present, requires notice. In one corner of the building was a glass-door, which, but for a low, wooden panel, might easily have been mistaken for one of the windows. It opened into a spacious hall, tesselated with black and grey marble, and wainscoted with dark oak. A wide oaken staircase, with

twisted pillars and balustrades, occupied one side of the hall—on the other were doors leading into different apartments—and in front was a row of tall windows, reaching from the floor to the ceiling, and looking out into what might, by courtesy, be termed a garden, but which was, in reality, merely a high-walled, flagged enclosure, where flowers never grew, and whose sole ornament—for use it had none in that dim and deeply-buried quadrangle—was a heavy stone sun-dial, patched with white where the rain had succeeded in washing off the ever-accumulating soot. A profusion of ornament was, indeed, no feature either within or without the walls of this old house, the only token of it in the hall being the model of a large ship—once known as *The Queen of Sheba*—which had made many a long, golden voyage, and stood on brackets in mid-air, an object of wonder and admiration to all beholders. Neither were there any very remarkable indications of decorative art when you ascended the staircase to the first floor. You found yourself then in an open room, or lobby, of the same size as the hall beneath, in which was a small, dark, and discoloured, glazed, mahogany bookcase, and unless you were curious in maritime law, currency questions, or religious controversy, you would scarcely have been tempted to open it, to read for amusement. The lobby appeared, however, to be devoted, in some sort, to pleasure as well as to study, for it held a bagatelle-board, placed upon a settee, for the convenience of those who thought fit to play :—a dull game, in keeping with the locality. One large picture also hung there—the subject, apparently classical—but by great good fortune you could not make it out, time, mildew, and a cross-light having united to render that feat impossible; at a guess, however, you would pronounce it a first-rate specimen by a very bad master, and not be far out in your judgment. Some people ascribed it to the late Mr. President West, which was very nearly the same thing. Several doors led from this lobby : let us open one and see what is within.

It happens to be a morning-room, a large and lofty apartment, not too much filled with furniture to distract attention from the inmates. What the upholsterer's magazine has supplied seems principally to have been introduced a long time ago—sixty years at least—for the colours are faded, the draperies scanty, the patterns obsolete, and the fashion wholly out of date. It was once, perhaps, thought much of, but that must have been in a past generation, when a parsimonious simplicity was only another word for extreme plainness wedded to very little comfort. An open piano, of the newest construction, shows, however, that modern appliances are not altogether banished from the room, and several fine vases, filled with rare flowers, serve in some degree to redeem the general monotony of its aspect. On the walls, too, are four pictures—all, evidently, portraits. Two of these, which are only half-length, represent a lady and a gentleman, each in the costume worn at the close of the last century: the lady has a hard, pinched face, soured it may be, by sectarianism; the gentleman, on the other hand, wears a benevolent smile on his shrewd, sagacious countenance. The two remaining portraits exhibit all of the originals which it was in the painter's power to show. Their date is some thirty years later, and, like the first, they represent man and wife. The shrewdness and sagacity which mark the smaller male portrait have not disappeared from the larger one, but the smile has entirely vanished: it is either the mother's mind—for you see the relationship—which claims predominance, or an earlier and closer connexion with great affairs, that has made the eye look grave and the mouth stern. The second lady, young and of graceful form, charms as much by vivacity of expression as by beauty of feature: there is no shadow of care in her sweet eyes—no misgiving as to the brightness of existence on her rosy lips,—all there is radiant with hope and happiness.

Turn from this still-life—though some portraits there are which reveal more thought than the living heads themselves—and look upon her who sits with a single

companion in that apartment, and is destined to be the sole representative of the four in whose faces you read these various attributes. It is a girl of nineteen, in whom are mingled qualities both of mind and person belonging to them all, but modified by transmission.

For her person, she is tall, like her father—fair and well-formed, like her mother—but there the resemblance to her parents ceases, the outline of her face being her grandfather's, its expression that of her grandmother—with a difference—that which is most repulsive in the elder lady being softened, or rather altered, into a look of pain in the younger one ; there is no colour in her cheek, her lips are thin and compressed, and her large grey eyes lack the tender shade of brown which would have given them softness; yet, although her features have few of the properties of beauty, there are not wanting many who candidly declare that they give her the palm for it over every one else they know. There may be a reason for their saying so which would not strike you till you came to know her history.

For her mind, education has gone far to shape it in the best direction; all that can be taught, consistent with her age, she knows ; she is fluent in foreign tongues, a skilled musician, accomplished with her pencil, and given much to reading, occupying herself more with that than with the rest. But although she has been well endowed by nature and nearly perfected by tuition, she appears to set little store by her acquirements, not—perhaps—from undervaluing them, but because she is indifferent to the effect produced by their exhibition.

It is the same with what amuses others : the world is before her in all its freshness, yet she turns away from the offering with distaste. Her father's position in society places everything at her command, yet she flies from the glitter and brilliancy of the crowds that fill the palace he lives in at the other end of the town, and takes refuge—not amid the woods and dales and charming solitudes of the numerous country seats that call him master—but here in this pent-up City hou-

where the free air of heaven appears literally to stagnate, in these chill, dreary rooms, which nothing seems to animate, in this contrived loneliness to which pleasure, as the multitudes understand it, is an utter stranger.

Still, the place must have some attraction: what is it?

In this house she was born—in this house she passed the first ten years of her life—in this house the old man lives who laid the foundation of her vast inheritance.

It is the local attachment, then, and something more than filial affection, that brings her back at every opportunity she is able to create?

Say rather—though these influences may be at work—that the true cause arises from her early knowledge of her own condition.

As soon as the understanding came, her ears were filled with repititions of the limitless wealth that must one day be hers; money was the perpetual theme; she was the centre of a moneyed system with a boundless space around her, and no visible horizon for escape. She sickened of money before she learnt its uses, and when she came to know or imagine them—for she took a special view of the question—her malady grew into a confirmed disease.

She was the richest heiress in England, and might look in any direction she pleased for a suitor—her father's station alone brought princes to his door—but she heard one voice, louder than the tongues of all the world, which whispered to her—it was her own heart that spoke—that, look where she would, choose whomsoever she might, her fortune was the sole, the universal bait.

To avoid the occasion of being sought, and indulge undisturbed in a morbid feeling which strengthens as it grows, she avails herself of the privilege she enjoys of being already, in a great degree, her own mistress—for the beautiful bosom from which she drew life has long been cold in death, and a statesman's ambitious pursuits engross her father now, as much as money—left to

make and remake itself, in compound fashion—had formerly done.

The career of that father and his sire, which established the great house of Temple Travers, named almost with fear when spoken of—so deep is the respect which men pay to gold—exhibits a singular and unprecedented example of continuous success.

Of respectable family, with only moderate means, the elder Travers entered upon commerce while yet a very young man, in one of the largest provincial towns in England. He throve fast, married Miss Alice Temple, the only daughter of a wealthy nonconformist, removed to London, extended the sphere of his operations while bringing to bear upon them all the advantages which he derived from discounting, to an enormous extent, the paper of his country friends—the solvent ones—and had he died before his years had numbered half a century, he would yet have been reputed one of the richest men in the metropolis. But he did not die: on the contrary, by the aid of his able, enterprising son, and his own untiring exertions, always honorably employed, he lived to double, triple, and quadruple his capital before he withdrew from direct personal interference with its accumulation—and even then, when the stimulus was gone, he did not die. Perhaps for the reason that "The House" continued to give the most vigorous evidence of its vitality under the management of Mr. Temple Travers, who inherited all his father's aptitude for business, and applied to its extension powers peculiarly his own. Even when he, in his turn, ceased to be an active partner in the firm, and gave his attention mainly to politics. the old man still held on, a proverb and an oracle amongst moneyed men.

So it came to pass that Alice Temple Travers is, at the time we open the door to look upon her, the richest heiress in England.

There is one by her side, who rarely leaves her long alone, to whose inspiration—it may be—the feeling is partly owing which leads Miss Travers to avoid soci-

It is a lady of middle age, of soft and winning manners, with the gentlest voice, the meekest countenance, the most agreeable smile, and an eye that beams with the mildest and most subdued expression. To listen to her, for the hour together, you would say that she yielded to every suggestion, but when the day was over you might note the fact that she had gained her point in everything she advised. If Alice Travers found out too soon that the world was hollow and mankind interested, the timid doubts of Miss Nalders, her governess from infancy, and at this moment her companion, may have sown the first seeds of distrust; and if the plant has reached maturity, its nurture is scarcely less the work of the same persuasive speech. Miss Nalders has no separate existence that she can call hers: it is all bound up in that of her darling pupil; she sees with her eyes, listens with her ears, speaks with her tongue, echoes all her sentiments—yet invariably impresses her own.

And in this way, in a great measure, it comes to pass that Alice Temple Travers is, in the opinion of the world—which judges only from appearances,—the coldest, the haughtiest, the least lovable girl in London.

CHAPTER II.

A CONFERENCE.

A FEW years ago there stood on the verge of Pimlico, and within a stone's throw of Buckingham-gate, a tavern not of the very first class, which—perhaps out of compliment to the owner of the neighbouring palace—had for its sign the emblem of the House of Hanover, and was known as The White Horse.

It was chiefly resorted to by people of the order called shabby-genteel, with little money and next to no occupation—yet who somehow contrived to live on—and two or three small tradesmen's clubs lent it an air of quasi-respectability, of which, otherwise, it might have been unable to boast.

One dull November evening, when the discomfort of a thick, misty atmosphere was not confined to the streets, but penetrated everywhere within-doors, dimming the lights, and making what was already dingy still more squalid, the coffee-room of The White Horse was occupied by only two guests, who did not seem likely to add much to the landlord's profits—a solitary tumbler of gin-and-water, sipped alternately and at long intervals, being all they had called for since they came in, though they had been sitting face to face for upwards of an hour.

Their present condition and future prospects were, apparently, not the most inviting, for their conversation showed them to be men sufficiently out of suits with fortune.

There was a difference of several years in their respective ages. The senior of the two, whose face had an eager, foxy expression, a good deal heightened by very red hair and whiskers, and small grey eyes, appeared to

be about five-and-thirty; the younger, who was dark-browed and sallow, seemed scarcely twenty-six. Neither of them could be called well dressed, but the elder aimed at something more than his companion, in a tawdry handkerchief which he wore round his throat, and a large paste ring which glittered on one little finger, and was seldom out of sight for any length of time.

There had been a silence of full ten minutes since they had uttered a word, each being occupied by his own meditations; at last it was broken by the younger man.

"Can you tell me, Cutts," he said, suddenly raising his head, "what's to be the end of all this? Day after day goes by, I get poorer and poorer, and every moment the prospect becomes darker and darker. I'm sick of such a life!"

"Neither am I so particularly enamoured of my share of it," replied the person thus appealed to; "but it's a long lane, Brunton, that has no turning, and if you feel disposed to take my advice, I think I can help you out of it."

"Take your advice, Cutts," exclaimed the younger man impatiently; "why, I've taken nothing else for the last twelve months, and what has it all come to?"

"I grant you things might have turned out better——"

"Better! is it possible that they could be worse?"

"Yes, everything is possible. There's always 'a lower deep,' as Milton says—or, if you like Shakspeare better, 'Who is't can say he is at the worst?'"

"Hang Milton and Shakspeare!"

"With all my heart. They never did me any good. But why should you put yourself out of temper? You ought to try and take things coolly, like me."

"Like you! You always have some resource—some hole to creep out at!"

"So might you, if you did as I do."

"Perhaps I might," said Brunton, "but that's not altogether my fancy. Tell me some other way."

"You might have learnt it already, if you would but have listened."

"I listen now."

Mr., or "Captain" Cutts, as he was more socially termed—though not always—drained the last drops from the mutual glass before he spoke.

"I'll tell you then, Brunton, if you'll make yourself a little more amiable."

"What is it?" asked the younger man, still in no placable tone.

"If I should rub the skin off, you mustn't wince."

"Go on," said Brunton, doggedly.

"Well, then. You're out of place,—office, if you like,—and have been for the last six months,—no matter for the cause."

"No matter."

"You must get in again."

"And how am I to do that? What friends have I got?"

"Why, as to friends—why, they turn up when we least expect them;—like creditors, only not quite so fast, perhaps."

"I'm more likely to meet with creditors than friends;—and you know that, Cutts."

"What if you do owe me a trifle and can't pay, I can be your friend for all that, though I'm almost as much in want of money as yourself."

"Yes, but there are others beside you."

"And you want to keep out of their way,—or out of gaol,—which is about the same thing."

"What's the use of you telling me that? I know it as well as—better than—you do."

"Very likely, but I thought I said you were to keep your temper."

The young man glanced at his companion angrily, but did not speak.

"I've talked about you," said Mr. Cutts, slowly, "to a party that can be useful—if he chooses it."

Brunton made no comment, and Mr. Cutts continued:

"And that party," he said looking up at the clock, whose face was only just visible through the dull, dirty haze of the coffee-room,—"that party promised to look in here to-night somewhere about this time."

"What is he? A Bonnet, like yourself?"

Mr. Cutts took no notice of the disparaging remark, but replied:

"Rather better than that, though he has turned his hand to a good many things in his time. No. The party I speak of is a man of property."

"Which he don't mean to give away to you or me, I suppose."

"I fancy not. Giving is not exactly his *forte;* but he lends—in a large way, sometimes."

"Yes, on good security!"

"On security of some sort. That of course."

"And what does he call himself? What, I mean, is his ostensible position?"

This question was asked with more animation than the speaker had hitherto shown. The chance of some advantage accruing, however slight, was like a gleam of light on the horizon when skies are at the blackest.

"What he calls himself," replied Mr. Cutts, "is one thing, and what some people call him another. But his 'ostensible position'—if that's the way you put it—is that of a general dealer."

"Which means?"

"Pictures, crockery, gimcracks of all kinds—what is generally known as *virtù*, for which—not for its English namesake—there is so great a rage now-a-days."

"And is this all?"

"Hm! not precisely. He has money at command, and deals in that, too."

"Rather more to the purpose, so far as I am concerned. He does bills, in short.

"In short, and in long too."

"But how can a poor devil like me get any good out of him? He wouldn't, of course, advance one rap upon a bill of mine, even with the precious endorsement of Thomas Cutts, by way of somebody to fall back upon."

"There's no saying," returned the Captain, unmoved by the sneer; "people go out of their way, now and then, when they want to please themselves."

"Or have some particular object in view."

"The same thing. But," continued Captain Cutts, "I suppose now—only just suppose it—if my friend was willing to make you an advance on such terms as might be agreed to, what would you give me for the introduction?"

"Half," replied the young man promptly.

"And take all the risk?"

"I don't know what that may be, but I'll stand it. I run the risk, at present, of being starved, before many days are over, and whatever happens can't be much worse than starving."

"Not much, Dick, as times go. I think, then, it's not unlikely you and he may have a deal. There's somebody at the door; I shouldn't wonder if it was our customer!"

Captain Cutts was truer of prophecy on this occasion than he generally was of speech. The coffee-room door slowly opened, and a man's head appeared, peeping in.

"All right!" said the Captain, who was opposite the entrance. "Come in, Mr. A."

The individual thus briefly designated closed the door behind him and came up to the table where the two were sitting. The Captain in reply to the stranger's salutation, made room for him by his side.

Mr. A. was an elderly man, nearer sixty, perhaps, than any other age, with dark piercing eyes beneath very moveable black brows, which contrasted strikingly with a fringe of white whisker that travelled from ear to ear. He looked hard at Brunton, as a prison warder looks at a fresh arrival, and when the scrutiny was over he nodded, as much as to say, "I shan't forget *you* in a hurry!"

The Captain was the first to speak.

"I was talking of you, Mr. A.," he said, "the moment before I saw you. I was telling my young friend here

that it was probable you might be dropping in, though it's not the pleasantest night to be out of doors."

"No," returned the new comer, with a sweeping glance round the room, which settled on the empty tumbler, and seemed to imply that the dreary room he had entered was little better than the damp street he had left—"no. But business is business. I'd a little matter to look after here, in Belgravian-square, and thought of killing two birds with one stone. So! you've been talking about me, have you? Well to tell you the truth, I was thinking of you as I came along. I thought to myself, 'I wonder what the Captain's going to stand this uncommon nasty evening.'"

Captain Cutts was not a gentleman so easily put out of countenance by any remark, come from where it would, and although this was an appeal to his breeches'-pocket, under very doubtful circumstances, he met the difficulty cheerfully.

"I'll stand anything you please, Mr. A.," was his reply, "from ditch-water to brandy."

"Let's split the difference," said Mr. A., "and make it hot brandy-and-water, without the ditch flavour."

"So be it," assented the Captain, and, summoning the waiter, he ordered a supply for each. When they were left to themselves again, Mr. A. took a small enamelled box from his pocket, and after eyeing it admiringly for a few moments, handed it across the table to Brunton.

"Are you a judge of paintings?" he asked; but added, without waiting for the answer, "That's beautiful!"

"So it appears," said Brunton, "and must be worth a good deal."

"You're right there," returned Mr. A. "Should you like to buy it? Only sixty guineas to a friend, cost me all the money."

"Sixty guineas! I haven't sixty pence," said Brunton, bitterly, the tide of his ill-humour not yet at ebb,—"not sixty pence, nor half the sum, nor a tenth part of it, to [illegible] a rope or a dose of laudanum!"

"In that case," observed Mr. A., as gravely as if he had been in earnest,—"in that case it's of no use making you the offer."

"Let me see it," said Captain Cutts. "Ah,—this is what you call a Petitot, I suppose. Fine, very fine!"

"It *is* fine," said Mr. A., reclaiming the box, and bestowing upon it another look of admiration before he returned it to his waistcoat-pocket. "But it's not a Petitot. No,—it's a Zincke. You don't know the difference—and there are a great many like you. Now," he continued, shutting up his box and his connoisseurship at the same time, and speaking in an altered manner, "we've something else to talk about. I didn't come here to-night to sell miniatures. Your name is Brunton?"

"Yes," replied the young man, "it is."

"Your father—a tradesman at Banbury—gave you a good education."

"Rugby may answer for that."

"But instead of following your father's business, you took to the turf, shook your elbow, and lost nearly all he left you. Part of the time, though you were abroad—in France and Germany."

"You seem to know my history pretty well."

"That's not all. Before everything was gone, in a fit of repentance, or spirit of opposition—no matter which—you took to the law, entered yourself with Mr So-and-So—never mind who—and staid with him—till you left him!"

"Cutts, I suppose, has given you his version of that story as well as all the rest!"

"Don't let us be too particular: we'll just keep to the general outline. Falling in again with our friend here, he persuaded you—quite against your will, of course—to cut the office and follow his bright example."

"If you know all this," exclaimed Brunton, passionately, "what do you mean by cramming it down my throat again?"

"Keep quiet, my dear. If I hadn't a meaning

shouldn't take so much trouble. I'd rather catalogue pictures than faults any day: it does one a great deal more good. So much for one side of the question. Now for the other. You have first-rate abilities: all you want is a fair field to exercise them in. You wouldn't wish to go back to the law again?"

"How could I?"

"Very true: how could you? No. That isn't to be thought of. Should you have any objection to commerce?"

"In what way?"

"Ah, yes—commerce is a word of many meanings. A house of business, now—in the City?"

"After the confession I made a little while ago, it stands to reason I would accept almost anything for a livelihood. Beggars mustn't be choosers."

"You understand bookkeeping, and all that? At all events, I do;—and what you don't know can soon be taught you. Well, then, you've no objection take what I offer——and put yourself entirely in my hands?"

"None at all, provided you take me out of my own. Only the sooner you do it the better."

"So far then it's a bargain," said Mr. A. "Remember, I'm a man of honour!"

"A bargain," returned Brunton, wringing Mr. A.'s lank, outstretched fingers,—"a bargain, if you were——"

"The Captain," interrupted Mr. A., with a grim smile.

"Very well. He fills up the blank quite as well as the other."

"Thank you!" said Captain Cutts, composedly. "Here's both your healths."

Mr. A. took out his watch, a large, old-fashioned repeater—it once had a royal owner. "My time's come," he said. "Call upon me to-morrow morning, at eight. Don't be later. Here's my card!"

He finished his glass as he spoke, buttoned up his great-coat, and was leaving the room, when the Captain stopped him

"Wait a minute, Mr. A. I've a word to say before you go. I don't mind telling you, but the fact is, Brunton, as you know, has got no money, and I—I—in fact—came out without my purse. Just lend me five shillings till to-morrow."

Mr. A. turned round and gave him one of his searching glances.

"Ah!" he said, "you left your purse at home. So did I. But I'll tell you what. It's not too late. There's a pawnbroker's next door. Raise the money on that diamond ring. It's a sparkler. Good night, Mr. Brunton. Recollect to-morrow, at eight."

"Infernal Jew!" exclaimed Captain Cutts, as the door closed upon him. I must pay then after all!"

"Can this man mean what he says?" asked Brunton, looking at the card.

"Mean it? Yes. Or he wouldn't have given you that. What's on it?"

Brunton read as follows:

MR. REUBEN ASHLEY,

64, *Finsbury Circus.*

"That means business. Keep your appointment. Any more of this? Well, then——Waiter! wha'ts to pay?"

If Captain Cutts had forgotten his purse, he had not parted with the contents. He found enough for the reckoning, and settled it. The two friends then left The White Horse together, and soon afterwards parted for the night. Brunton took his way to an obscure lodging in Westminster, while the Captain went across the Park to Jermyn-street, where he was in the habit of passing the night—more or less to his advantage, according to the pull of the table or the chance of picking up a flat.

CHAPTER III.

THE BARGAIN.

FROM Smith-square, Millbank, to Finsbury-circus, is full four miles—taking the nearest way—yet Richard Brunton, who left home at seven o'clock, while it was yet dark, arrived at his destination at least ten minutes before the time appointed.

He occupied the interval in reconnoitring the exterior of Mr Ashley's substantial-looking house, but—with the punctuality of a suitor, and somewhat of a suitor's sense of dread—did not venture to knock until a neighbouring clock began to strike the hour. Although he had taken this early walk expressly for the purpose of the interview,—although all his future expectations might be said to depend upon the result, he could not help wishing—while he waited till the door was opened—that the servant might tell him Mr. Ashley was not at home: the information would have been at once a disappointment and a relief!

No such thing, however, happened. Mr. Ashley expected him, and he was ushered into a parlour where he found that gentleman reading a sale-catalogue.

"Ah!" said he, looking up, "good morning, Mr. Brunton! You keep your time. That's right. Breakfasted? No—I see you haven't. You'll take some with me. Must trouble you to wait just five minutes, while I run my eye over these lots: some good things here;—too good to be missed. There, amuse yourself by looking at that cabinet—it's a real bit of *cinque cento*, lovely carving,—examine the draperies of those figures in the niches—they'll bear it;—observe the subject of the centre panel—David with Goliath's head,—that kind of work is

not often met with now-a-days! You don't know anybody who wants such a thing for his library?"

The question and the commentary which preceded it were so much a part of Mr. Ashley's stock-in-trade, that Brunton need not have replied, as he did, in the negative; for as soon as he had done speaking, the Hebrew dealer returned to his catalogue, scoring with his pencil the numbers of the objects on which he set his mind.

There was plenty for Brunton to amuse himself with in the room, besides the *cinque cento* cabinet. Works of art of that period abounded; indeed they formed the staple of what he saw. There were vases of Majolica,—bowls of Gubbio lustre ware,—dishes from the hand of Palissy,—enamels of Limoges,—*cruches* of grès de Flandres,—Venetian glass,—damascened weapons,—carved ivories,—ingenious globular watches,—ornaments in bronze and in niello,—curiously-shaped utensils, in wood, in pottery, and in metal, enough to have occupied him throughout a long summer's day.

But Brunton knew or cared little about art,—was too anxious to break ground with his host, now that he was fairly entered for the purpose,—or wanted his breakfast too badly, not to feel very well satisfied to hear Mr. Ashley's voice again.

"Ah! it's a pity, my dear, that you haven't money and taste. I could sell you such bargains! But there's no saying what may happen; one of these days you may have both. Ah! here comes breakfast. I hope you've a good appetite."

From his eagerness to drink at the expense of Captain Cutts on the previous night, the young man had augured little that was favourable to his entertainer's hospitality, but he was agreeably deceived: a hungrier man than Brunton—though it would not have been easy to find one—might have risen satisfied from Mr. Ashley's breakfast-table.

The conversation had turned on indifferent topics during the meal, but as soon as it was over, Mr. Ashley

plunged at once—as was his habit—into the middle of his subject.

"When I left you last night," he said, "I mentioned that I was going to Belgravian-square."

"I understood so," replied Brunton, half smiling—remembering the peculiar expression—for with all his knowledge of art Mr. Ashley now and then fell into slip-slop. In the days when he was plain Jacob Asser, education was not so rife as it now is with those of his persuasion.

"Well," continued the dealer in curiosities, "I sold that enamelled snuff-box."

"Did you?" returned Brunton, not particularly interested in the transaction.

"Yes. Dirt cheap. Considering who bought it. But such a man as that can afford to give anything."

From which remark it may be inferred that the purchaser had paid pretty handsomely.

Mr. Ashley resumed:

"A late hour you'll say for doing business, but, Lord bless you, my dear, it's never too late for that. Besides, my customer is not to be got at when other people are. He's a great man—a very great man!"

"Is he?" was Brunton's laconic remark, less interested even than before.

"Yes; and a good word from him goes a long way—at either end of the town. I spoke to him about you."

"About me!" exclaimed Brunton, who now perceived that the Hebrew had not been "beating water." "About me! you gave me some hope of an appointment in—in—the City."

"I did, my dear. And I set about getting it in Belgravian-square. The fact is, that gentleman stands better in the City than the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He's first chop, I can assure you."

"May I ask his name?"

"To be sure. And I'll tell you. Mr Temple Travers. Ah! you may stare. You've heard that name before?"

"A[illegible] here, in the City—is it not?"

"*The* great firm, you mean. Now, what should you say if I got you a situation there?"

"Say! That you were the best friend I ever had in my life."

"Is that all? What would you do?"

"Everything, to prove that I thought so."

"We shall see. Now I'll tell you exactly what took place between me and Mr. Temple Travers. After I had put up his cheque, and given a glance round the room—it's full of fine things: there's one *marqueterie* table I sold him hasn't its fellow in London—I said, 'Well, Mr. Temple Travers, it's a sight to see you now, sir! Since you was returned to Parliament, and took such a lead in the House of Commons, the other "House" in Broad-street seems quite lost without you.'—'I hope not,' says he, with a sort of smile. 'I hear good accounts of it still.'—'And well you may, sir,' I replied; 'A 1 is about the mark it figures at.'—'Yes,' he observed, 'I believe it has not declined since my retirement.—'If you had stayed, sir,' I continued, 'active in it as you used to be, there's no name that one could have given to it; it's an institution as it stands.'—'I am very glad to hear you say so, Mr. Ashley,' he answered, 'for you are a judge of these matters, I know. I recollect when you were more of a commercial man than you are now, before you took up the trade of ministering to the whims of *virtuosi* like myself.'—'Ah!' said I, 'You remember that time, sir, do you? So do I.'—And so I do, my dear," repeated Mr. Ashley, fixing his keen eyes, which glittered like diamonds, full on the face of Richard Brunton, and speaking more slowly, "that house and me did business together once upon a time."

Mr. Ashley paused for a moment with closely compressed lips and brows closely knitted, and then went on again:

"Well, he had just hit upon the point that I wanted to bring him to, so I struck in without any more ado. 'Your speaking of that, Mr. Temple Travers, emboldens me to make a request of you.'—'What is that, Mr

Ashley?' he asked; 'I'm sure I shall be very happy to serve you as far as lies in my power.'—'Then, sir,' said I, 'there's a young man of my acquaintance—a friend of mine, in fact—who has been a little unfortunate; the house he got into failed, and left him high and dry'—I was obliged to tell my story my own way, my dear—'he is very clever and very honest'—I suppose you are, my dear"—here he gave Brunton another of his searching glances, the meaning of which it was not easy to interpret,—"'and,' I continued, 'if I could get him a clerkship in the house in Broad-street, I needn't tell you, Mr. Temple Travers, that it would be the making of him.'—'Was the firm in a large way that he belonged to?' asked he.—'No, sir,' I replied; 'I'm bound to say it was not. Perhaps you never heard of it. Wilkins and Sowerberry, in the drug-line, over-traded to the Levant, obliged to sell heavily on a falling market, a panic came and they couldn't stand it—Wilkins was found dead in his bed, and Sowerberry disappeared the same day the fiat was issued; he's never been heard of since—that's their history.'—'A common one enough in these days of over-speculation,' said he, seemingly making an effort to remember the names of the parties. 'Wilkins and Sowerberry—Wilkins and Sowerberry—no—I never heard of them.'"

"Nor I, upon my word," interrupted Richard Brunton. „What made you say ——"

"I knew well enough what I was saying, my dear. The people are gone altogether. It's of no use referring to them, but you must have some sort of godfathers. You might be an angel, but, if you hadn't been in business, such a house as Temple Travers's wouldn't so much as look at you. 'What can the young man do?'—this was how he went on again. 'Is his knowledge general or special?'—'General,' said I; 'but he has been abroad—knows several languages—can be useful, I'm sure, in correspondence; in short, Mr. Temple Travers, he has what I call great abilities.'"

"You give me a very good character," said Brunton,

laughing, "upon a very bad warranty. I hope I shall be able to stand the test."

"Never you fear, my dear," returned Mr. Ashley. "I don't often make mistakes. Please to recollect you're in my hands. If I say you're clever, you must justify my assertion. I needn't dwell any longer upon this part of the subject. 'Mr. Ashley,' said Mr. Temple Travers, 'if this young man'—here he asked your name, and I told him—'if Mr. Brunton has your recommendation he shan't want for mine. You know that I never interfere personally, now, with the affairs of the house, but your friend shall have an introduction to the managing partner. Stay, I'll write it at once.' And here it is, my dear," exclaimed Mr. Ashley, triumphantly holding up a letter with a large seal which he took out of a pocket-book; "Temple Travers never lets the grass grow under his feet—never did—or he wouldn't be the man he is. He added, when he put the letter in my hand, 'I would have seen the young man, Mr. Ashley, but really if you knew how seriously every moment of my time is occupied—I have not adopted an easier life since I left the City, I can assure you—at some future time, perhaps, I may be able—but I shall hear, of course, how he goes on, and then—by-the-by, don't forget me, Mr. Ashley, if you happen to fall in with a Peter Oliver—I am very anxious to complete my historical series'—and so on, with which I need not trouble you, my dear. The prime thing is *there*."

And, as Mr. Ashley thus brought his narrative to an end, he threw the letter on the table.

That a perfect stranger should so warmly interest himself in his welfare—that a patron so influential as Mr. Temple Travers should have been raised through the medium of Captain Cutts—that so strange an ebb should thus suddenly have taken place in the current of his fortunes—all this was so astounding to Richard Brunton, that it kept him silent for several minutes.

"The Jew watched without disturbing him, as he sat with his head bent over the table.

At length Brunton looked up and spoke.

"I am sure, sir," he said, "you have done for me what I never could have dreamt of—what no human being of my accquaintance would or could have attempted. I am perfectly at a loss for words to express my gratitude."

"I haven't quite done, my dear," said Mr. Ashley. I think you said last night that you were rather short of money: hinted at laudanum, or something of that sort, which showed you were not over flush."

"That is true enough," returned Brunton. "It's of no use to conceal the fact. If I had not been invited by you, I don't know were I should have broken my fast to-day!"

"Don't trouble yourself about that any more. You shall have bed and board here, my dear, as long as its convenient. I've some young ladies in my family who have a knack of making the time pass very pleasantly. I can't say what salary you'll get at Temple Travers's;—may be none at all for the first six months, till they see what sort of stuff you're made of,—for they're not people to buy a pig in a poke. But you mustn't want a little of the ready. You have an appearance to make. It don't do, my dear, in this world, to run yourself down, or let people make remarks. You must dress a little better, and so forth. Excuse me if I speak my mind a little plainly."

"I feel the truth of what you say, sir," said Brunton, colouring. I am, I know—except the clothes I stand in, and they, as you say, are not worth much—little better than a pauper."

"That's a harder word than mine, my dear, though its more genteel, perhaps. At your age it sounds like a verdict of 'temp'rary insanity." All nonsense. As your bed's made you must lay in it. But about the cash, my dear. I never do things by halves. I'll lend you some. How much, now, do you want? Would a hundred do?"

"It would be ample," said Brunton, "for everything I require for—for—myself."

"Ah—I see—you owe money. Any acceptances out—any judgment debts?"

"None of the last, upon my honour! I *have* backed one or two bills for Cutts—and he has done the same for me—and then—I may as well make a clean breast of it—I owe fifty or sixty pounds in different places."

"Which means more than double the amount when you come to look everything up. I know. And then there's a watch in pawn, and a set of studs, and perhaps a dress coat and waistcoat—don't blush, I'm not going to tell. Now you take pen, ink, and paper—there they are—make a true and complete list, leave out nobody, leave out nothing—and then we'll see what's to be done. I dare say we can compromise the whole for twenty per cent. *down*. But you mustn't leave a farthing outstanding."

The benevolent Hebrew returned to his catalogue while Richard Brunton went through the enjoined calculation. Let a man's debts be never so numerous, there's no forgetting a single item if you're in earnest in the attempt to recal them. Aquafortis does not bite the engraver's copper more sharply than debt gnaws the memory. In the course of half an hour Brunton had completed his task. The sum total amounted to a trifle less than three hundred pounds.

Mr. Ashley smiled when he saw it.

"You are certain this is all?"

"As of my own existence. But I have not put down the money owing to me that I've lent in different quarters."

"And you needn't. You'll never get a penny of it. That's gone goose. Three hundred to these people, and a hundred for yourself—say a hundred—that will be four, eh? Now, if I make this advance, how do you mean to repay it? Have you formed any plan for doing so?"

"I can't think, sir," replied Brunton, "that I shall be long employed at Temple Travers's without a salary. They must give me one, for I'll earn it. You shall have any lien on that you like to name."

"No," said the friendly Dealer, "I won't touch yo

salary till you're better able to afford it.—But I'll tell you what we'll do. I put down a hundred pounds in hard cash,—I buy off all your creditors,—I take up these acceptances—yours, not Cutts's,—I keep him at a distance and satisfy him, for of course he looks to you for something to be got out of me, you have made him some kind of promise, I know,—he never does nothing for nothing. Well, I undertake all this,—I set you free as air, with money in your pocket, and you give me, in exchange," —here he paused and looked hard at Brunton, scanning every line of his countenance,—"you give me a bond for TEN THOUSAND POUNDS, payable whenever I choose to enforce it!"

It was not so much the enormous sum that made Brunton open his own eyes so widely, as the nature of the proposed compact. What a vista it opened, for the moment, and then what a mockery it seemed! Twelve hours before he had almost meditated suicide as the only means of escape from his embarrassments, and now he was called upon to enter into an engagement to the extent of Ten Thousand Pounds, as if unlimited credit were at his command! Could the offer be bonâ fide? Was this Mr Ashley in his senses?

Whether sane or not, it certainly appeared as if he were in earnest, for the same pocket-book which had held the letter of Mr. Temple Travers was again produced, and from it the Dealer took a roll of bank-notes. He counted them out as deliberately as a banker's clerk would have done, and pushed them across the table to Brunton.

"Here," he said, "is the cash; take it,—and take care of it. The letter may as well remain here till to-morrow, when you will deliver it yourself. Now go and do what you have to do,—I shall be busy enough till I see you at dinner,—six sharp; afterwards we'll sign and seal. In the evening, when business is over, you shall make acquaintance with my girls. You'll be struck with Matilda; that is, if you're fond of music. And I say, bear in mind one thing, my dear,—keep clear of Captain Cutts—[illegible] events for the present."

At a much slower pace than he came from thence Richard Brunton returned to Smith-square. But one thought occupied him:

"What on earth can he mean by such a bargain!"

—o—

CHAPTER IV.

BUSINESS BEGUN.

POVERTY stronger than Will—or Will too strong for Principle—has been the excuse of thousands besides the Mantuan apothecary, and it might have been urged in the case of Richard Brunton.

He had accepted Mr. Ashley's statements respecting himself with barely a word of remonstrance—without a shadow of real opposition, and yet he knew that they were altogether untrue.

Such being their character, could he believe that the purpose for which they were made was good?

The answer to this question was difficult, and Brunton shaped his after the usual fashion of people who care not to make too strict an inquiry where their own interests are concerned. Mr. Ashley's representations, as far as he could see, had done harm to nobody: on the contrary, they had procured, or were likely to procure, a capital situation for Brunton. All the rest depended upon himself. He had nothing to do with the motives of the Hebrew Dealer. If the latter chose to make Brunton's fortune, with an eye to his own, what was there in that to object to? The thing was done every day, in one form or other. It would be absurd for Mr. Ashley to exact payment of the bond until Brunton was able to meet it, and, by the time he was master of ten thousand pounds in cash, it was reasonable to suppose his credit would be

equal to at least five times as much more. He would start with the fixed resolve to grow rich; he would make money with every opportunity; he would save—and speculate; and, in these days of speculation, what was to prevent him from being a capitalist as well as another? To this success there was no avenue save the one opened for him so unexpectedly by his newly-acquired friend. It would be the height of folly, he argued, to throw away a chance that never could occur again. He knew enough of the shady side of life, and it should be his own fault if he kept out of the sunshine in future.

With reasoning of this sort, Richard Brunton satisfied whatever qualms of conscience had arisen, when he reflected on his ready acquiescence in the account given of him to Mr. Temple Travers.

It was too late, indeed, for hesitation to have availed him anything. He had already tacitly consented to the arrangement proposed by Mr. Ashley when he took his money, and as the first thing he did after reaching his lodging was to redeem his wardrobe and pay some small accounts, of a kind which he could not bring himself to enter in his general schedule, no other course remained—as he thought—but that of fulfilling his engagement to the letter. He found, moreover, on his return to Finsbury Circus, that Mr. Ashley had not, on his part, been idle. What amount he had actually expended in the settlement of Brunton's debts was not stated; but that they *were* settled was clear, by the production of receipts from all his creditors. It had been a hard day's work, perhaps, but as Mr. Ashley himself observed:

"These things generally lie in a ring-fence, my dear; the tradesmen, in a cluster in the middle; the attorneys, scattered outside, but then one knows where to find 'em."

Under these circumstances Richard Brunton signed the paper which bound him to the payment of ten thousand pounds at some indefinite period in the far-off future. The young look at Time as if he were for ever receding—the old as if he were always near.

The evening passed off gaily ; it was the pleasantest Richard Brunton had known for many a long day, and Mr. Ashley was in excellent spirits, although he had parted with his cash upon what might have appeared to others a very doubtful contingency. He fulfilled his promise of making his young friend known to his family. It consisted only of his daughters, Mr. Ashley being a widower.

They were three in number : Matilda, Caroline, and Julia—names that savoured more of adoption than descent, a custom which prevails to some extent with modern Israel.

Matilda, the eldest, composed with taste, played admirably, and sang—as her father said—"heavenly;" Caroline's *forte* was oil-painting, in which art—*teste* her father also—she was no mean proficient; Julia, the youngest—to whose talents paternal affection again bore witness—shone principally in conversation. It scarcely required Mr. Ashley's ever-sounding trumpet to make these accomplishments known, for they were seldom veiled by the young ladies themselves, readiness of exhibition being a faculty which they possessed in common. They had, besides, considerable personal attractions, accompanied by a tendency—not at all special to their nation—to make the most of their charms—a tendency in which these black-eyed, bright-cheeked, dark-haired damsels also displayed the greatest unanimity. It might even be said of them—if to say so and be believed were probable—that they entertained no separate feeling in the dead set which they invariably made upon every new comer, whom they looked upon as general property, whether the new comer's attentions were particular to one or divided amongst all three : in plainer terms—Matilda's lover was loved by Caroline, loved by Julia, and *vice versa* in the case of each, without—as it seemed—a particle of jealousy being awakened in the breasts of either.

To Richard Brunton this kind of reception was, on a first acquaintance, exceedingly agreeable. To talk with

Julia, to praise Caroline, to listen to Matilda, were pleasures to which he very willingly surrendered himself, but he went no further: prudence, the consciousness that Mr. Ashley's watchful eye was upon him all the while, and the fact that his time had not yet come, being his effectual love-preservers. He was even able to withstand Matilda's parting song when, according to custom, she threw her head back and glancing over her shoulder with her large lustrous eyes, warbled in melting accents:

A kind good night to *thee*, love!
And a kind good night to *thee!*

the second person singular being, with that young lady, in every instance the above-mentioned latest comer.

Heart-whole, therefore, though surrounded by temptation, Richard Brunton withdrew that night from Finsbury-circus, having received Mr. Ashley's offer of general hospitality in the spirit in which it was meant—by accepting it only in the modified form of a business-dinner.

He had, indeed, other matters to think of besides love-making, had he been ever so much disposed that way, for on the following day he was to present himself with Mr. Temple Travers's letter of introduction at the house in Broad-street.

It was addressed to Mr. Velters, the managing partner, whom he found in an inner room, after passing through an avenue of laborious clerks, whose occupations their principal could survey, through a glass-door which enfiladed every desk, without moving from his high official stool.

Mr. Velters was a man of the true business-type. In his domestic circle, surrounded by wife and children, he probably had a heart, but, if so, he always left it at home:—it never travelled to the City, and, as far as those were concerned who had dealings with him, he might as well have been without one. He had a hard, spare, closely buttoned-up person that seemed bullet-proof, and a hard, cold face on which no news, short

of the intelligence that the Bank of England had stopped payment, could produce any impression, and it may be a question if even that universal calamity would have moved a muscle of his rigid, inflexible features. Assuredly it was not in the power of the most vigilant scrutiny to discern the slightest emotion when such an event befel any of the firms with which his house was connected. "See how they stand," was Mr. Velters's first word of command if the slightest whisper reached him that "Washbrick and Gathercole"—"Hamper and Blinkhorn"—"Tygo and Bree"—or any other commercial notability, were in a doubtful position; and long before the doubt became a public fact, the books of "Temple Travers" were closed against them. Mr. Velters had the keenest eye in the City for bad paper. "What do you mean?" he would say to a customer, as he rapidly turned over a pile of bills and lighted upon a questionable name, which he discovered in an instant—"what do you mean by bringing me this rubbish? Withdraw your account, sir, immediately!" In the commercial world, of all others, the most difficult task for the man of business is to arrive at the positive—but Mr. Velters seldom erred; he possessed a natural aptitude for stripping pretension of all its trappings, and—if his dignity does not lose by the comparison—he might have achieved the highest reputation as a police-detective.

Something of this faculty had been revealed by Mr. Ashley to Richard Brunton, and it was well for the latter that he was endowed with nerve when he confronted Mr. Velters. But he had been counselled to say as little as possible, to stick to a very brief statement, lying within the smallest compass, and to imitate his questioner in succinctness.

Mr. Velters received him standing, his hands in the pockets of his grey trousers: a single trumpet-shaped carnelian seal dangled at the end of a long, bright chain from his fob—a glimpse of a canary-coloured waistcoat was visible where the only one of the metal buttons of his blue body-coat was unfastened—and a white neck-

cloth and a bit of frill beneath his chin, completed a costume which may be considered as typical of bankers, all other classes of men having long ago abandoned it.

"Your business, sir?" said Mr. Velters.

Brunton explained that he was the bearer of a letter from Mr. Temple Travers.

Without a word of remark Mr. Velters held out his hand for the letter.

When he had read it he said:

"Sowerberry and Wilkins,—Levant trade?"

"Yes, sir."

"Failed?"

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

"Last May."

"How much for?"

"Thirty-seven thousand, odd."

"Any assets?"

"Eight thousand,—nominal."

"What became of the partners?"

"One died,—the other absconded."

"Leaving you?——"

"Without employment."

"How long were you there?"

"Three years and a half."

"What was your duty?"

"Chiefly, foreign correspondence."

"You know—how many languages?"

"Four, thoroughly; three more, imperfectly."

"In the first class?"

"French, German, Spanish, and Italian."

"In the second?"

"Modern Greek—some Turkish, and a little Arabic."

"Who vouches for all this, besides yourself?"

"As to the languages, try me, sir, in any way you please. For my character, I believe Mr. Ashley, of Finsbury-circus, has satisfied your Mr. Temple Travers."

"Hm! Yes—you have been recommended or I shouldn't have wasted so many words upon you. If

we take you—into our corresponding department—when can you come?"

"Now—to-morrow—whenever you choose, sir; I am quite at your disposal."

"You shall be examined at once, then."

Mr. Velters released one hand from its contact with a pocketful of half-crowns, which he kept jingling all the time he spoke, and pressed the handle of a call-bell.

A stout, substantial clerk, one of the regular City-solidities, obeyed the summons.

"Mr. Browser," said the great man, taking a file of impaled correspondence, "letters must be written to-day to Schneider and Wolf of Hamburg—Molini and Co. of Leghorn—Decaux and Perrot of Paris—and Barrios, Brothers, of Madrid, advising receipts of seconds and thirds of exchange and other matters; take them! Give the particulars to this gentleman, who will write the letters, and when they are finished bring them to me. You may go, sir!"

So saying, Mr. Velters turned his back on Richard Brunton, who bowed, and left the room with Mr. Browser.

He had not overstated his accomplishments, and being really used to mercantile correspondence—circumstances while on the Continent having rendered him familiar with its technicalities—he soon performed his allotted task, as much to the astonishment as the delight of good-natured Mr. Browser, who had witnessed and sighed over many an experimental breakdown. Incurious as all the clerks habitually were to things that did not relate to their own duties, more than one head was raised inquiringly while Brunton was at work. The exulting pantomime of Mr. Browser, as letter after letter was handed to him, soon satisfied them that a first-rate hand was likely to become their associate, and this fact being ascertained, down went the clerkly heads again and onward sped their toil.

Brunton's expedition only just sufficed to meet the requirements of Mr. Velters. Scarcely had he finished

his work when the call-bell again sounded, and Mr. Browser gathering up the correspondence, hurried away with it to the inner room. Brunton, who remained behind, watched the result with some anxiety. There was no smile of approval on the managing partner's lips as, after reading each paper attentively, he laid them all on the table before him. He said something, however, but unless Brunton had heard the words he could have drawn no inference from them whatever: a nutcracker's wooden jaws are not more inexpressive than was the countenance of Mr. Velters. Neither did the features of Mr. Browser reveal anything to Brunton's eager eye, so long as his face was towards his principal, but as soon as he turned to leave the room, the young man's fears subsided.

"You'll do!" said Mr. Browser, shaking him by the hand when he came out, while his broad face beamed with satisfaction; "Mr. Velters wants to see you again. Nobody goes twice into that office without employment."

The second interview differed little in character from the first. Mr. Velters had ceased to be interrogative—that was all. He uttered no syllable of praise, but simply offered Brunton a conditional engagement. If, after three months' trial, Mr. Velters continued to be satisfied, the engagement would be permanent, with a salary proportioned to his abilities; if not, there was an end of the affair: he would be paid for his services and dismissed. During the period of probation he would sit at Mr. Browser's desk, and act under his instructions. Mr. Velters had only this to observe, in addition——

What it was, however, the sudden opening of a door, at the other end of the apartment, which caused him instantly to turn his head, prevented Mr. Velters from saying, and Brunton continued standing till it was the pleasure of the managing partner to resume his speech.

But the attention of Mr. Velters had been directed to an object of more interest than the future conduct of one of his clerks. A tall, thin old man, with a young lady

on his arm, had entered the room, and, with more *empressement* than could have been expected from his automaton movements in general, Mr. Velters crossed to meet them.

"Don't let me disturb business, I beg," said the old gentleman, with a courteous air.

"It is nothing, sir, nothing," replied Mr. Velters; "pray, sir, be seated. Miss Travers, allow me to offer you a chair."

"No, no!" interposed the old gentleman. "I have merely a word to say. My granddaughter is going to take a drive with me this morning—the carriage is here at the door—but before I went out, I wished to tell you I have just had a line from Temple, to say that a loan of eight millions has been decided on. The news, of course, will very soon be made public; but it is desirable you should know the amount without loss of time."

"Very desirable, indeed! Thank you, sir—thank you. Have you any commands for the house, sir, this morning?"

"None, I am much obliged. Now, Alice, we will leave Mr. Velters to his books."

"Permit me to see you to your carriage. I hope, Miss Travers, you will some day honour Mrs. Velters by another visit. Her camellias, at Broadstone, will very soon be in full bloom."

Miss Travers bowed, without speaking, and the Managing Partner followed the great City Oracle and his granddaughter into the courtyard; they were followed, too, by Brunton's eyes, as long as they remained within sight.

Mr. Velters soon came back. His first words to Brunton were,

"Say nothing outside, sir, about this loan; and—what I was going to remark, a few minutes ago—remember that the rule of this establishment is work, sir, work!"

"More motive for it than ever," thought Richard Brunton, as he silently withdrew.

CHAPTER V.

LE BESOIN D'AIMER.

Is there any neutral ground on which youth and age may meet on equal terms? Can imagination be tethered to reality, or experience mount on the wings of hope and fancy? It would seem so, if the relations between Mr. Travers and his granddaughter are closely considered.

The old man has nearly reached the utmost limit allowed to human life; uniform success has attended his endeavours throughout his long career; he has achieved the highest standing in the commercial world, and realised the largest fortune; his only son holds a position even more distinguished than his own; if domestic affliction has twice thrown its shadow over his hearth, he has had but to deplore the common lot; the elastic spirit has risen to its former level, and the world's attractions—they exist alike for old and young—have not yet lost their charm. Therefore it is that he still has a want which he yearns to gratify. For nearly twenty years his hopes have centred on one object, and the time, he trusts, has now arrived for their fulfilment. The desire of his heart is to see Alice married, that the name which for half a century has been honoured in his own person may still survive in his descendants. More than this, he loves his granddaughter with the truest and deepest affection—he sees that wealth and station fail to satisfy her—he suspects some secret sorrow, and he endeavours to win her confidence, in the hope that by his counsel and assistance her happiness may be secured. For this purpose he suppresses the thoughts which belong to age, and speaks to Alice as if no sea of years rolled between them.

On her side, the young heiress may doubt the professions which the world is so eager to pour into her ears, may mistrust the interested word, and despise the flattery that meets her at every turn; but of the earnest sincerity with which her grandfather offers his love she can entertain no misgiving.

There is, consequently, a common point where their feelings may unite, and thus it happens that she seeks, instead of avoiding, the old man's society.

We have seen them together just now; let us follow them whither they are bound.

Mr. Travers has an old predilection for a certain spot on the northern outskirts of London. An old terrace walk is there, backed by a row of lofty trees, from whence, owing to the height at which it stands, a wide view of the distant city may be obtained when the winds from the west drive the mists down the river. There Mr. Travers delights to walk when the sun shines high and the breeze blows freely, stopping at intervals to rest, and gaze upon the vast hive in which he has been one of the thriftiest workers. There, too, he is fond of taking Alice when she visits the city, and consents to accompany him abroad. On these occasions Miss Nalders relinquishes her constant surveillance, and occupies herself alone in the antiquated drawing-room, with devices of old conception.

Mr. Travers and Alice are sitting, then, on the high northern terrace, which looks down upon busy London. They are discoursing upon the theme which is always uppermost in his thoughts, and is seldom a stranger to hers.

"And in the midst of all this brilliant society, Alice, you have never yet seen anybody likely to influence your choice?"

"Of all whom I have seen it is impossible to speak, but of those with whom I have made acquaintance certainly not one."

"And yet, go where you will, no house in London offers fairer opportunities than your father's!"

"That, I believe, is true; but it does not much advance the question. What is society? As it appears to me, simply the one eternal circle, beyond which those who once enter never stray. The people are always the same, their thoughts and actions identical—at all events in principle."

"You take a more comprehensive view than you admitted just now. You include all at one fell swoop."

"From what I really know, I infer the rest."

"That would be very well, Alice, if you could deal with mankind as we merchants do with our wares:—judge of them by samples. But no two minds are alike."

"To me they present no difference. I meet with no variety."

"You look only at the surface."

"Surface, dear grandpapa! What but surface characterises everybody one meets? To be as much like his neighbour as possible,—to wear the same unmeaning smile, to say the same insipid things, to suppress every noble thought, to stifle every generous emotion, to detract from merit, to worship success,—and success only,—to fawn upon 'the great,' as they are called, and bend the knee to circumstance,—such is the aim of all! There is no need to go beyond the surface."

"You speak bitterly, Alice,—more bitterly than your own observation should warrant. But you have made one admission. You acknowledge the existence of the merit which suffers by detraction. If you have found that, you have at least found something to redeem the world from universal censure."

"I wish I could say, dear grandpapa, that the discovery were mine: not to have been able to make it is the chief cause of my complaint. You mistake me if you suppose that I censure indiscriminately. No! I prize the nobility of mind, the generosity of soul, the independence of thought which must exist somewhere,—but of which I have only read. What I deplore is, their absence from the world—the special world,—in which it is my lot to live."

"You forget, my child, that the very world you at this moment condemn is that in which your own father has also, voluntarily, cast his lot. Do you think if he thought it so hollow, so worthless as your report would make it, that he would mingle with it himself or suffer you to remain there? Of his qualities of heart and mind you have more than read!"

"It is those qualities, dearest grandpapa, that I vainly seek to parallel. But our situations are very different. My father stands high in everyone's esteem,—his advice is sought by statesmen,—his word is an authority,—his example an object for all imitation; the world of which we speak is only an adjunct to the wide sphere in which he moves; he must tolerate what is faulty in one place for the sake of that latent good which he finds in another; in his position he cannot accept the whole and refuse a part. I, on the contrary, who, by myself, am nothing,—who have no freedom of choice,—before whom there lies only one track,—I must remain within the limits assigned me, measure with weary feet the path that leads round and round to the same dull goal,—a race without competition, an end without an object."

"So then, Alice," said Mr. Travers, gravely—"because *you* cannot have a part you refuse the whole! Is this sound logic?"

"I cannot think otherwise—at least in my own case. I reason from what I feel. To me the 'part' you speak of is, necessarily, *all:* this makes the vital difference between my father's position and my own."

Mr. Travers sighed.

"And have the labours of seventy years, the endeavours of two—not unindustrious—lives, no other result than disappointment?"

Alice took her grandfather's hand.

"Do not think me discontented," she exclaimed. "As I said before, I am nobody. To my father and to yourself, dearest grandpapa, everything I have, whether of education or of means, is owing. I should be deeply ungrateful if I failed in thankfulness to you both. My

duty and my love stand entirely apart from my opinion. Ask what you will of the first, and, trust me, you shall not be disappointed."

"I shall never ask you for anything, dearest Alice, but what your heart can freely give. If I speak of disappointment, it has no reference to your conduct. In that respect you are all I can desire. But I have seen with pain your disinclination for society,—I have heard with regret your avowal of the cause; not because I believe the picture you have drawn to be true, but on account of the impression which you have received. At your age, my child, the fault generally lies on the other side. Happily you are still very young. A day may come—soon, I trust—when you will think differently."

"Not," replied Alice, "so long as I am known to be the daughter of Mr. Temple Travers. An heiress never hears the truth. To that fact my eyes were very soon opened. Warned in time by Margaret"—she alluded to Miss Nalders—"and that warning confirmed by my own experience, I know how to estimate at their full value all the protestations I hear. My beauty, they say, is beyond praise: there is no need for me to look in the glass to see if this be true; my memory, not half a day old, gives that flattery the lie. My disposition is everything that is amiable: they know nothing about it who speak. My accomplishments exceed those of all others: well for me if they suffice as resources for myself. And do you conceive, grandpapa, that one word of all this would reach my ears, if I were other—in a worldly point of view—than what I am?"

"You underrate your own attractions, Alice. Granted, however, that flatterers only have hitherto addressed you, surely there must be some who are free from this taint of self-interest!"

"It may be so, grandpapa, but such persons, I fear, are undiscoverable."

"Well, then, Alice, let it be my task—unless you should yourself forestal me—to find one who is really worthy of you. A great undertaking, you will say, at

my time of life, and"—he added, smiling—"perhaps you will think, a great presumption. I do not promise you a man of rank, or even a man of fortune, but he shall be a man of honour!"

"He who has honour," replied Alice, with energy, "holds the highest rank in my estimation, and stands in no need of fortune."

"Let it, then," said Mr. Travers, "be a bargain between us, Alice. I think better of society than you do, and shall not ask for the cynic's lantern to guide me in my search. Still, the decision must rest with yourself; I will not force my candidate upon you, but leave you free as air to form your own conclusion. The world must be greatly altered if, before a year is over, I do not see you a happy married woman!"

Alice shook her head, but looked less sad than usual. It must go hard, indeed, with youth when age is the more hopeful of the two.

CHAPTER VI.

LE BESOIN DE SE MARIER.

If to love be a woman's necessity, to marry—under certain circumstances—is equally imperative on man.

What those circumstances are, greatly depends.

You are old and almost imbecile—quite so perhaps—and fancy bright eyes and comfort: you are of middle-age and club-sick, and feel that the married state is alone respectable: you are young and foolish, and long to be the father of a family: these are motives; but there is one stronger than them all—you are so exceedingly hard-up that, in your own opinion, nothing can save you from starvation but a wealthy marriage.

It must be noticed that this resolution, however desperately it may appear to be adopted, is never suddenly taken. Most young gentlemen, with slender fortunes and whiskers yet in the germ, say, as they run up their first cigar bill, "I'll marry some devilish rich widow!" but, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, they don't. In the first place, rich widows—whatever young gentlemen may suppose to the contrary—are not as plenty as blackberries; in the next, the fair inconsolables generally marry again to please themselves, and throw the handkerchief oftener than they catch at it; and, lastly, the young gentlemen in question, by the time their whiskers are full-grown, and other and heavier bills have accumulated, for the most part espouse young ladies, whose worldly goods add something in the way of baggage, but very little in the shape of fortune.

Be this as it may, the possibility of being obliged some day to marry for money is always looming in the distance of every fast young man about town. That "something to fall back upon, when the worst comes to the worst," is never entirely absent from their thoughts, so that when the fatal period arrives, the victim is, in a great degree, prepared to meet his fate.

Of those who gave their consent to this special arrangement several years before it was asked, Lord Harry FitzLupus (I omit the six intermediate baptismal names), fourth son of the Marquis of Wolverton, was a bright and shining example.

His position was this:

His eldest brother, Viscount Loupgarou, had the family borough, and, with the family titles, would succeed to the family estates; Lord Algernon, who came next, was in the church, and enjoyed all the family preferment; Lord Gerald, the third son, went into the navy, and, if there had been a family ship, he would have got it—as it was, he put up, at four-and-twenty, with an ordinary frigate; and, "as for me," Lord Harry was in the habit of saying, when he detailed his grievances, "they shoved *me* into the Blues."

Of all the rest of his brothers, or of his sisters, he said nothing; he had no interest in looking down.

What Lord Harry FitzLupus did in "The Blues" is easily told. Once in three weeks—or even once a fortnight, if duty was heavy—he rode *down* Regent-street in helmet, corslet, and jack-boots, on his way to the Horse Guards, where—being "on" duty—he smoked as many cigars, ate of as many dishes, played as many rubbers, and slept as many hours as usual, riding back again *up* Regent-street, in the same warlike array, on his way to barracks, next morning, when he came "off" duty. Three times a week, during the season—duty not interfering—he cultivated his taste for the ballet in the Omnibus-box of Her Majesty's Theatre; and three times a week—with the same reservation—he filled up the off-nights at other theatres than those of Her Majesty, "screaming" farce, with plenty of "gag"—of the kind so freely manufactured by certain accomplished artists—being what he most delighted in. Seven times a week—by which arrangement he found employment for Sunday—Lord Harry FitzLupus was to be found, when the stars grew dim and Detectives were gone to bed, in a kind of first-floor-Sebastopol in Jermyn-street, or in some adjacent sister fortress, from which he seldom departed until he was a considerably poorer, if not a much wiser man.

By these processes, although Lord Harry FitzLupus acquired a vast amount of military knowledge, established a reputation for knowing what life was, and earned, *à juste titre*, the honoured epithet of "patron of the drama," he melted away, in a manner imperceptible even to himself—first of all, the fifteen thousand pounds that were his own—then the five thousand which his pitying aunt, the Countess of Sheepskin, gave him—and finally the thirty-seven thousand five hundred and forty-four pounds ten and elevenpence halfpenny which, on the strength of his expectations from the aforesaid old lady, he succeeded in borrowing.

When a man can no longer pay his mess-bill—to

nothing of his tailor, his bootmaker, his hosier, and all that herd—*toute cette pécore là*—it is time for him to think of leaving the army. Besides, as not one man in twenty goes into "The Blues" with the intention of remaining after he has got his troop, and as a troop is worth a good deal of money, to dispose of it is the legitimate issue of every Blue's career. So Lord Harry Fitz-Lupus did as others had done before him: he sold out.

More than that: he paid the messman, partly paid one tailor—left fifty of that category to howl, with bills unpaid, over their own supineness—in not taking time by the forelock when cash was to be had—went into the Highlands and stalked—went into Norfolk and shot, into Leicestershire and hunted—went on the Continent and gambled. He might have stalked and shot till the crack of doom—a friend's forests and a friend's preserves don't make away with much of the ready; he might—barring accidents—have hunted for at least a couple of seasons on the proceeds of his commission; but the pull of the table at Homburg, combined with an infallible martingale which, of course, broke down, completely cleaned him out in the course of six weeks; and, at the end of a twelvemonth from his subsidence in "The Blues," he had subsided altogether.

In common parlance he was "utterly ruined;" but everybody knows that utter ruin to a FitzLupus—until it has befallen him for the twentieth time—means simply that he can no longer keep up with the friends who haven't yet got through their respective patrimonies. The ruined young FitzLupus dresses as well as ever, rides as fine a horse as formerly, goes about—unless his creditors are more than commonly inexorable—just as he used to do: the only difference is that a father, an uncle, or somebody—he is not so particular as to ask which of his relations—"stands the racket," or whether they all club for it—pays him the four hundred a year, without which he says—and they all say—it is impossible to live.

There are many people who, in the same situation, would—like Jaffier—be "pleas'd with ruin."

Another thing is to be observed with respect to this calamity, so overwhelming to all but the class FitzLupus—and, here and there, a stray bankrupt on a large scale, for whom friendly assignees have a large compassion—namely, that their ruin is never of long duration. A watchful "something" is always waiting to turn up, and there they are on their legs again, to all appearance, as right as ever. A lucky bequest, a good appointment, or, perhaps, a fortunate marriage, comes in the nick of time to comfort the "curl'd darling" and release him from what he feels—how acutely!—to be such a state of slavish dependence as having only four hundred a year—the gift of "somebody"—to exist upon.

Our especial FitzLupus—the Lord Harry—had his share of ruin like the rest. The "four hundred a year" were duly paid, together with two more by the Countess of Sheepskin, to qualify her nephew, as he impressed upon her, to sit for the family borough, which Viscount Loupgarou, who was tired of it, resigned in Harry's favour; a kind of composition was made with the "worst-disposed"—so he styled them—amongst his creditors,—and once more he breathed the pure and balmy air of St. James's.

But breathing balmy air in St. James's, although impregnated with the odour of Carlin's best cigars, was not exactly the *finale* at which Lord Harry wished to arrive. You perceive that, although he had a seat in the House, with six hundred a year, he was very far from being *au grand complet.* The seat was well enough in its way: it prevented *him* from being seized, though his goods and chattels were still exposed to seizure,—or might have been, if he had not made them all over by a bill of sale to his friend Chichester Fleetwood. But what could he *do* with such a modicum as the sum just mentioned?

"A man must have his Clubs and all that,—his Greenwich and Richmond and all that,—his private

boxes and subscriptions and all that—and then there are lots of things that a man *must* have!"

It stood to reason,—as he was in the habit of adding,—that a man must therefore look out for something.

What should it be? A seat on the Treasury Bench behind the Minister for whom he always voted? Well, the offer hadn't yet been made, though it ought to have been; for, however astonishing the fact, Lord Harry FitzLupus had supported the Premier in a speech which made a considerable sensation, both in the House and out of it.

As it was the only speech he ever did make in that august Assembly, and will not take up much room, I may as well transcribe it, as it is written in "Hansard."

The subject was the Income-Tax. Messrs. Blight and Smasher had eloquently denounced the iniquities of Schedule D, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer was beginning to tremble at the possibility of a majority against Ministers, when—taking advantage of a pause—Lord Harry FitzLupus rose. An old Treasury hack got on his legs at the same time, but there was a cry of "New member!" and the ci-devant Blue remained in possession of the House.

"I think, sir," he said, with a prolonged drawl, which added greatly to the effect of his oratory—"I think, sir, befaw this ques—tion goes to a—a—di—vi—sion, the pers'—nal ex—pe—rience of those who have *not* suf—far'd—("Hear! hear!" from the old Treasury-hack)—"*not* suf—far'd from the in—quis—a—torial—I b'lieve that was the word made use of by the hon—a—rable member for a—a—Glen—with—ar—shins, the in—quis—a—to—rial man—nar in which this a—a—tax is le—vied (cheers from the Opposition), ought to be a—a—ta—ken into consideration (counter cheers from the Ministerial benches). Now, for my own part, sir, I ne—var suf—far'd from anything of the kind." ("Hear! hear!" from the old Treasury-hack.) "The fel—lah that gets paid for a—a—col—lecting the tax, goes, I suppose, to your agent—or the person that is to pay

you your money—and then he gives him the tax, and a—a—tells you of it af—tar—wards,—and that's all you evar hear about it. I don't a—a—call that a—in—qui—sa—to—rial!" (Shouts of derisive laughter from the Opposition, in the midst of which Lord Harry Fitz-Lupus complacently resumed his seat.)

This brilliant defence of ministerial policy very nearly turned out the Government, and yet Lord Harry grumbled, as he resumed the summary of his claims. An attaché-ship? He spoke French: wasn't that a claim,—and yet the Foreign Secretary, whose accent was so bad that it made the French ambassador ill for three days after every interview—didn't see how the interests of the country could be safely confided to a nobleman who had not received a diplomatic education. The Foreign Secretary was a humbug—that was clear enough; besides what *was* an attaché-ship after all? One had to wait so long before one got any pay, and a man couldn't afford that. No! There was only one thing left for him:—he must make up his mind to have somebody.

Who should it be was the grand point; and, to determine it, Lord Harry FitzLupus put himself into the hands of his friends,—as if he were going to be shot at.

His friends, who saw in this resolution their only chance of getting back the money they, from time to time, had lent him, met *en petit comité*, to discuss the matter.

The occasion was a dinner at the house of Lord Dangerfield, a nobleman who, in addition to a crowd of amiable qualities, was said to play at *écarté* better than most people, and in the exercise of this virtue was supposed to find his reward.

The party, besides the host and his illustrious victim, consisted of only six persons, the intimates, of course, of both.

There were:—Chichester Fleetwood, whom everybody looked up to for advice; Lord Tiplady, who having himself married an heiress—and spent her fortune

knew all the social bearings of the case; Coates Taylor, a little, long-legged *bossu*, familiarly called "Crooky," who was up to a thing or two; Sir John Peckover, the best *parti* in England, but not at all disposed to change *his* condition; Phil Buckinger, an excellent judge of monetary matters, especially in the shape of odds; and, finally, the Vicomte Adolphe de Vaurien, an Anglicised French gentleman, whose talents were universal.

"Now then, Harry!" began Lord Dangerfield, as soon as the butler was gone, after setting on a full supply of claret,—"fill your glass, and tell us all about it."

"Speech from the throne," said Sir John Peckover, who had just got into Parliament. "My Lords and Gentlemen,—called you together—early season of the year——"

"Hold your tongue, Peck," interrupted Lord Dangerfield,—"you're not moving the Address: go on, Harry."

But before Lord Harry speaks on a subject so full of personal interest, the features and form on which he so greatly relies for the success of his project, may as well be briefly sketched.

If character to be inferred from capillary development, Lord Harry had an immense deal of character. His pale, yellow hair, parted in the centre, flowed in broad waves across his noble forehead; his pale yellow moustaches streamed like two rivers into his pale yellow whiskers, and the latter expanded from the confluence till they had doubled the size of a countenance which nature, who delights in curves, had kindly fashioned as round as an orange. Indeed, Lord Harry's face, in which there is nothing else to describe, very much reminded you of that fruit—some time before it reaches maturity. He had a very long neck, which gave his head the appearance of being stuck—like Macbeth's—on a pole; his shoulders were broad, his body large, and for his height—which had been his chief qualification for The Blues—he stood, without the aid of jack-boots, very

nearly six feet three. When such a giant opens his lips, be sure it is for some oracular purpose.

"The fact is," said Lord Harry, with his accustomed drawl, "Peck is right, I *must* speak about my a—a—Alliances—and shall trouble him—when I come to the a—a subject of Supplies."

"Hear, hear!" cried the guests in chorus, and Lord Harry continued:

"The fact is,"—this was a figure of speech which helped his lordship along as a crutch helps a cripple,—"the fact is—and most of you know it,—I haven't got a dump that I can call my own."

Universal silence betokened universal assent to this very naked proposition.

"Well then," said the orator,—"What am I to go and do? I've been thinking it over some time. Crooky suggested—and I mean to drink his health for it by-and-by—that I should go and give lectures,—as everybody does now, parti—cu—larly if he's in the House,—and make a pot of money that way. 'It's all very well talking, you know, but what am I to lecture about?'—that's what I said to Crooky,—'can you give me a subject?'—'How to get into debt,' says he, 'nobody can explain that better than you!'—Did you ever hear of such a heartless villain?"

"I think, *mon cher*," said Adolphe de Vaurien, "that Crookie would have done so much bettaire if he had showed you how to get out of him."

"There's nothing to be got out of him," said Phil Buckinger, taking advantage of the Viscount's English, and creating a laugh at Coates Taylor's expense.

"You never did," observed Crooky, quietly, "and what's more, you never will."

"The next thing he proposed," continued Lord Harry,—"was that I should take—a—a—Exeter Hall,—I think it was,—Exeter Hall, or some such place,—and get up some scenery and a band of music, and give as a popular—a—a—enter—tain—ment, my own experiences at 'Little Nick,' with *tableaux* of the police

breaking in, the table shutting up behind the looking-glass,—the bones and pasteboard flying down the spout, and all that sort of thing. 'Very amusing, Crooky, no doubt,' said I to him, 'but—a—a—in that case you must be check-taker, and how much of the a—a—tin is likely to get into my pocket, if you have the handing of it,—is a matter between you and that—a—a—very in—fi—ni—te—si—mal quan—ti—ty, your conscience.'"

"Bravo, Harry!" shouted Phil Buckinger; "he has you there, Crooky!"

That gentleman smiled, while Lord Harry returned:

"'Can't you show up your friends?' was Crooky's last suggestion. 'They'll take, if you don't. There's nothing spices a lecture so much as personality. It's all the fashion now.' I might, perhaps, have tried that—a—a—expe—ri—ment,—but unluckily I hadn't been sent on a foreign mission, and so I had nothing *new* to say about anybody. In short, I a—a—gave up the idea of lecturing."

"I agree with you, Harry," said Lord Tiplady, "that lecturing's not your *forte*. I look upon all lectures as infernal bores."

"Some of them are, no doubt," remarked Chichester Fleetwood, alluding to the Tiplady *ménage;* at which the noble Baron looked grim, and sipped his claret till he obtained relief.

"After that, Harry?" inquired Lord Dangerfield.

"After that, I didn't ask Crooky for any more advice, but took counsel a—a—with my own bosom."

"What did you find there to help you?" asked Sir John Peckover.

"My heart, Peck," said Lord Harry, solemnly—"my heart. It whispered ——"

"Oh, bother the sentiment," interrupted Sir John; "get on."

"You are a cold-blooded animal, Peck, and you know it. Dangerfield, you can feel for me—so can you,

Fleetwood—so can you, Tiplady—my heart whispered, 'FitzLupus, take a wife!'"

"Whose?" asked Phil Buckinger, who didn't mind using a printed joke.

"Pas mal," said De Faurien, to whom the Sheridanism was new. It missed fire, however, with the others.

"My aunt, Sheepskin," pursued Lord Harry, "had already said the same thing—at least fifty times—so when I found that my inward a—a—monitor—and the dear old lady—were hunting in couples——"

"Hear! hear!" from Sir John, who kept hounds.

——"I thought," continued Lord Harry, yawning,—"I thought I'd—ask—some of you fellahs—to look one up for me. And—that's where it is."

"Lady Sheepskin is a very judicious personage," said Lord Dangerfield; "and you are a most wise and exemplary nephew to listen to her at last. But I was sure it would come to this. Fleetwood and I were talking the subject over only yesterday."

"Oh," observed Fleetwood, "the principle was settled long ago—before Harry left the Blues—its application is now the question. What do *you* say, Crooky?"

"Say? It's the only sensible notion that ever got into Harry's head. The application of it is easy enough."

"Comment ça?" asked the Vicomte, who was also single, and not overburdened with cash.

"Ware hawk, Vaurien," said the little humpback, with an intelligent nod. "Your turn by-and-by. Listen to me, Fleetwood—listen Dangerfield. It Fitz is resolved to marry, he mustn't throw himself away—we can't allow it—he must do the thing handsomely—go the whole porcupine."

"Apt simile!" murmured Lord Tiplady. "Let me see, who are there that one may call 'marriageable'?"

"Mrs. Crumple, the old tea-dealer's widow, is marriageable enough, for he was her fourth husband," said Chichester Fleetwood, laughing. "Her diamonds are worth a hundred thousand, they say."

"Give me the dia—monds, Chi—ches—ter," said Lord Harry, "and I'll a—a—make you a present of a—a—Mrs. Bohea!"

"What about the woman that drives the piebalds—Countess Constantia Cripplegate?" questioned Phil Buckinger.

"Who's she?" asked everybody.

"A Countess in her own right. She owns a slate quarry——"

"And a chalk pit," interrupted Coates Taylor. "This is all trash. Tea-dealers' widows and self-styled Countesses may answer some folks' purposes, but not Harry's—there is only one girl in London that will suit him."

"I guess whom you mean," said Lord Dangerfield.

"To be sure you do. Who should it be but Alice Travers!"

"Her father, Temple Travers," said Phil Buckinger to the Vicomte, "once offered to pay the National Debt."

"Farceur! Half of that will do for me."

"The old man in the City," said Sir John Peckover, "is no end of a Crœsus!"

"He is the grandfather of cheques!" observed Lord Tiplady, Orientally.

"She will come in for five millions!" chimed in Chichester Fleetwood.

"That will do," said Lord Harry FitzLupus, yawning again, and throwing himself languidly back in his chair. "That will do, Chi—ches—ter,—I'll have her."

CHAPTER VII.

PROPOSALS.

EIGHTEEN months have gone by, and the words of Mr. Velters have not been cast on a barren soil. Richard Brunton has planted his foot—and planted it firmly—in the house of Temple Travers. Assiduous and intelligent, he has acquired a deep insight into commercial affairs, transactions of considerable importance have been entrusted to his management, and on more than one occasion his name, with favourable comments, has reached the ears of the elder Mr. Travers. Mr. Velters gives him plenty of work to do, and that with him is the equivalent of praise; the cohort of clerks amidst whom he toils acknowledge to themselves the abilities which they decry to each other; and honest Mr. Browser is both astonished and delighted at the progress made by one whom he complacently calls his favourite pupil.

It is with much satisfaction also that Mr. Reuben Ashley learns how well Richard Brunton stands with the great house into which he was the means of introducing him. They meet at certain intervals, but Mr. Ashley never alludes to the engagement which subsists between them, and if he counsels Brunton to labour hard to earn the confidence of his employers, that advice is given, without doubt, solely for the purpose of advancing the young man's interests. Such a course is only natural, because on Brunton's success in life depends, as we know, a very large expectation on the part of Mr. Ashley.

So far, then, everything connected with Richard Brunton's position wears the best possible aspect; he is gaining ground rapidly, and may soon hope to achieve

one of the many objects of his ambition, for the ambition he nourishes is not content with a single aim.

The eighteen months which have brought about this result have not passed away without effecting some change in most of the personages already mentioned in this story. Whether his course be for good or ill, Time stands still with none.

The change is least apparent, perhaps, in the Travers family. The old man, who scrupulously weighs every consideration in seeking a husband for his granddaughter, has not yet met with a sufficiently eligible person. He has spoken on the subject to Mr. Temple Travers, but their views do not quite agree.

The elder of the two has but one pursuit; it has yielded him all he desired, and he looks only in that direction. A man of integrity, holding the position of a first-rate London merchant, is all-in-all with him.

But Mr. Temple Travers, who belongs now to a world distinct from that of his father, considers the question through a different medium. He would rather make an alliance with rank—not for the rank's sake—but because he believes that high political life offers the only reward. Worth, in the abstract, he assigns to no particular class, allowing that it may be found everywhere, but high-placed worth, he contends, is the best of any.

"If," he said, when the subject was discussed between them, in reply to his father's objection that men of family allied themselves with the newly rich chiefly to restore their fallen fortunes—"if I encouraged the pretensions of mere rank, Lord Harry FitzLupus, whom everybody speaks of as the most devoted of my daughter's admirers, would answer my purpose as well as another, for—except that he is a fool—I know nothing against his character. You will say that is more than enough, and I think so too, but Lord Harry is not in question. Alice has far too much good sense to give him any encouragement, though I could wish she showed less indifference to some whom I myself prefer. There is Lord Preston, for instance: a nobleman of the most estimable qualities, and

very highly thought of by every one. He is rich—and there your objection falls at once to the ground—well-informed and of the most perfect equanimity of temper —and the difference of age between himself and Alice is, in my opinion, rather an advantage than the reverse. Between thirty-five and twenty there is no such great disparity. However, it is not my intention, as you know, to force my daughter's inclinations. She is perfectly free to choose—and whether it be your candidate or mine, or one of her own selection—provided, in the latter instance, there be no insuperable bar, my own feelings and wishes having been declared,—I shall not attempt to interfere."

Mr. Travers smiled at his son's reservation, as if he thought that the whole question lay, practically, there. He changed, or seemed to change, the subject.

"I intended to have asked you, Temple, but it escaped my memory, whether you had lately heard from India?"

"You mean," replied Mr. Temple Travers, "from Philip Hastings!"

"Yes."

"A few months since. He was then with his regiment at Delhi, and getting on extremely well. I dare say his mother has received more recent intelligence, for she said, when last I saw her, that Philip was a punctual correspondent."

"Punctuality is an excellent feature in a young man's character; but, indeed, he was always a good boy. At one time, Temple, you were very fond of him."

"Very—that is—yes—certainly!"

"I never clearly understood," continued Mr. Travers, "why he so suddenly changed his views with respect to a profession. Connected as he was with our family, with the best prospects that any one could have if he had embraced a mercantile life, and—in my opinion—possessed of talents peculiarly adapted to business—that he should have thrown away such a chance for the uncertainties of a military career, has always surprised me greatly."

"It is scarcely a thing to wonder at," said Mr. Temple Travers, coldly; "it happens every day."

"But Philip was so steady and quiet in his habits, and seemed so happy."

There was something in these remarks that jarred upon a feeling in the bosom of Mr. Temple Travers, hitherto unexpressed. He answered rather abruptly,

"He was, I suspect, too happy."

"In what way, Temple? I do not exactly see your meaning."

"My dear father," said the statesman, "this is a subject I never cared to enter into. Philip Hastings had, undoubtedly, many good qualities, but he may have been unstable in spite of his apparent steadiness—restless, although he seemed quiet; at all events he considered that here—in our house—he was out of place, for it was by his own desire, at his own especial request, that I procured for him the Indian appointment."

"Yes, I know that—and I also know how liberally you behaved to him both then and afterwards. But still the enigma is not solved."

"Learn it then, father, in a few words. Philip Hastings was attached to Alice."

"As her cousin, Temple."

"As her cousin—yes; but as her lover still more."

"And did Alice return his affection?"

"I should think not—but I have no certain means of judging. No explanation was ever asked or given. The scene that led to Philip's departure from England was curious enough. I knew by numberless tokens that the boy was in love with Alice. His constant presence in Belgrave-square when she was at home; his studious absence when she was away; the delight he experienced in her society; the listlessness with which he addressed himself to his usual pursuits;—these, and a thousand things which need not be repeated, satisfied me that I was right in my suspicion. One day he came to say he wished to speak to me alone. I anticipated an avowal of his passion. I was mistaken: his object was alto-

gether different. He began by speaking of his mother, whom he described as a widow in fact though not in name—then of his father, whose fate, unexplained for fifteen years, was to her a perpetual source of sorrow and conjecture. He told me his mother had never been satisfied that the report of her husband's death was true: his body had never been found after the battle with the Affghans in which he was supposed to have been killed, and although other officers who had been made prisoners on the occasion could give no information respecting him, she still believed that the word 'missing,' originally attached to his name, might yet be explained by secret captivity. I listened to all this, and reminded him that it was an old story, and, as I had often observed before, one not very probable. The rank of Colonel Hastings, I said, was against the idea of secrecy; besides, what purpose of his captors could it answer? It was far more likely, the battle having been fought near a deep and rapid river, that he had been wounded and drowned in the endeavour to rejoin his own troops after their discomfiture. But, I added, why was the question again raised after it had slumbered so long? He answered, with some degree of hesitation, that his mother alluded to her loss so frequently that it had forced itself very much upon his own thoughts; so much so, indeed, that he had at last adopted the resolution, if I would give my permission and assistance, of seeking for his father himself. To do so, with any prospect of success, it would be necessary for him to enter the Indian army. I told him fairly that, in my view of the case, the notion was Quixotic and absurd. Was it, I asked, his real and sole motive for wishing to leave England? With a burning face and downcast eyes he answered faintly that it was. I had no right to urge him further. It was not my duty to restrain his filial piety. Whatever I might suspect, my deductions ought not to weigh against his own statement. It was not, after all, unnatural—let the prudence of the step be what it might—that he should desire

to relieve his mother's anxiety and remove the great doubt of his own life. If disappointed affection weighed with him—and it was not for me to probe that wound, being unprepared with a remedy—the best cure undoubtedly was absence. At twenty years of age, a new world, a new occupation, and the earnest purpose which he avowed, offered ample materials for filling his mind with fresh objects and easily effacing the past. I said to him, therefore, that sorry as we all must be to lose him, I would not throw any obstacle in his way; on the contrary, he might reckon upon receiving from me all the assistance he required. It may be that he had looked for a more serious opposition to his scheme than the first few words of discouragement which I had uttered; he may have entertained a hope that I should seek to dissuade him by this or that reason, strong enough to convince him against his declared inclination; but, whether or not, his pride sustained him, and he showed no signs of faltering. He thanked me very warmly for what he termed my kindness, and then went on to say that, as the understanding was complete, the sooner he set out for India the better. I took him, of course, at his word—it would have been idle not to have done so, productive of I know not what consequences—and within a month from the date of our interview he was on his route, with a cavalry appointment, to the Bengal Presidency. There! you have the history, now, of the manner in which the change in Philip's profession came about: you may judge as I do of the reason—or form a different conclusion."

"If mine be the same as yours," observed Mr. Travers, "I cannot but say that the boy acted wisely and honourably."

"I agree with you entirely," replied Mr. Temple Travers. "He raised himself so highly in my esteem by the course he adopted, that he may always count upon the best support I can give him in his far-off career. Should he marry while in India—a very probable event,

for the majority of officers do so—his wife and family—in case anything happens to himself—shall be equally my care."

"And mine, too, if I live," said Mr. Travers. "But there is another contingency. He may possibly discover his father!"

"I consider that a mere chimera. Philip has already been two years in the country, is now stationed near the Affghan frontier, where the opportunity for inquiry is increased, and not the slightest tidings have been obtained. Even supposing that Colonel Hastings was actually taken prisoner, the chances are that he did not long survive: otherwise he would have discovered the means of making his existence known. No! no! Philip will be bound by other ties;—his profession will interest him as it opens for his advancement;—if ever we see him again, it will be under very different circumstances."

We persuade ourselves easily where we cherish a strong desire, and although a close observer of human weakness, Mr. Temple Travers was not exempt from the common failing.

His skill in prophecy was yet to be tested—time might prove him right or wrong—but were his earlier conclusions correct? Suppose that a feeling had once existed in the bosom of Alice akin to that which, as he imagined, had stirred the heart of Philip Hastings! What proof had he that such a feeling was extinguished? Might not the unwillingness of Alice to listen to any proposal of marriage—her marked distaste for society—be traced to that source? The original destination of Philip Hastings was commerce. For that purpose he had been placed in "the house," and, being related to the family, had lived on the spot with his mother, in a suite of apartments given them by Mr. Travers. Had the charm of association anything to do with the frequent visits of Alice to the City? Uneasy thoughts tending to these inquiries occasionally floated through the mind of Mr. Temple Travers; but when he remembered that hi-

daughter had worn her present joyless aspect ever since her childhood, that the departure of her cousin had wrought in her no apparent change, that she had not forborne to speak of Philip, and always spoke calmly—and when he, moreover, reflected that a person so watchful as Margaret Nalders was always at her side, his doubts disappeared as quickly as they had arisen, and he again looked forward to the hope of one day seeing Alice the wife of his political friend and associate Lord Preston.

And what effect have the eighteen vanished months produced on Alice herself?

Have they more and more confirmed her in the belief that the life she leads is but the vanity of vanities? Or does she, under that staid and serious demeanour, cherish hopes, the stronger for their secret nurture? Here also it remains for Time to disclose the truth, for outwardly there is no revelation.

One event has, indeed, occurred to her which usually causes some sensation in a woman's bosom. Miss Temple Travers has received proposals of marriage.

The proposer was Lord Harry FitzLupus.

Under what circumstances they took place he himself related to his friend Coates Taylor, as they slowly walked their horses up Rotton-row one fine summer's evening.

"It's all vary well for you, Crooky, to say," replied Lord Harry to a remark from his friend, "that I a—a—don't get on with the girl. I tell you, my dear fellah,—be quiet, Ros-a-lind,—how troublesome the flies are!—I tell you a—a—that I do!"

"Be so good, Harry, as to show me in what way. Your'e not privately married, I suppose."

"Not exactly, Crooky, no, not that. But I've a—a—twice been da-v'lish near it."

"I don't understand what you mean by 'twice.' Once is enough, in all conscience!"

"Ah, you don't see? The fact is I proposed to her on two different occasions."

"And have been twice refused, eh? That don't look like a come off. I should as soon expect to win the

Leger with a horse that had lost the Derby and Ascot cup the same year. But how was it?"

"Soon aftar I was entar'd—to use your own me-ta-pha-ri-cal language, Crooky,—I went in to win, and while a lot of other fellahs kept a—a—tailing off, I made straight running. Odd enough, the first time it happened we were not a hundred yards from this place,—just there where the road dips. I was riding with her,—pleasanter company than yours, Crooky,—well! She had just been admiring Rosalind,—I gave two hundred and fifty for her ——"

"I know you did, I lent you the money," rejoined Coates Taylor.

"And when she praised my horse," continued Lord Harry, not heeding his friend's interruption, "I thought it gave me a good oppar-tu-nity. 'The cree-char,' I said, patting Rosalind's neck, 'will soon, I hope, have a new ownar!' 'Are you going to sell it?' she asked. I said, 'No! not sell, Miss Travars,—I want to give her away!' 'That's easily done,' replied the lady. 'But she must be taken, a—a—Miss Travars, with all her a—a—incumbrances.' 'Saddle and bridle, I suppose!' said she, smi-ling. 'And ridar,' I added, par-suasively, looking her full in the face. She turned away her head. 'Bew-ti-ful Miss Travars,' I whispared, bringing Rosalind close up to her, 'bew-ti-ful Miss Travars, I adaw you!' Just at that moment her horse shied at something in the road and went off at full gallop. I followed of cawse, but didn't overtake her till she had joined her father and the rest of her party who were in front: I couldn't ask her again befaw such a ruck. It would have been a—a—nearly as bad as banns! Davil of a baw, wasn't it?"

"How about your second venture?"

"It was a good while befaw I had another chance. I used to go to Belgrave-square and all sorts of houses, but nevar could see her. Somebody told me she was always in the City, in Bread-street, or Brad-street, or

some such place—I couldn't go there, you know—nevar *was* there, don't know the way! At last I found out that she was in the habit of going to church at a—a—Saint Barnaby's—you've heard of it, I dare say, not far from Tatt's,—so I made up my mind to go there too. As you're not a Christian, Crooky, I must tell you there are no a—a—pews in Saint Barnaby's,—all open seats. I went early one Sunday, stood in a davil of a crowd for some time, till she appeared with a—a—that Miss Somebody that's always with her. As soon as she took her seat I follaw'd and got next to her, as if a—a—by accident. I tried to get her into con-var-sa-tion,—but what do you think, Crooky, the girl wouldn't talk! I'm not fond of mummary, you know, but I had to stand a good deal of it, before I was able a—a—to do anything. At last they came to some singing, and then I remembar'd that somewhere near the Psalms is all about what people say when they're married. So I looked for the place in the book, and after rummaging through evar so much about Ordaring of Deacons and Gunpowder Treason and Guy Fawkes and all that sort of thing, I came to it. There it was, the vary question they asked my cousin Emily Vere, at Saint George's, Hanover-square, when she married Billy Loftus,—'Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband?' and so on. What did I do, Crooky, but hold the book open befaw her and point to the words. I call that a—a—popping the question—don't you?"

"Something very like it. What did she say?"

"Nothing, Crooky!"

"Did she do anything?"

"Yes, Crooky. She touched Miss a—a—Somebody on the arm, and they a—a—changed places, and that disgus-ted me, and I walked out of Saint Barnaby's, and very nearly had a row with the man at the door, who wanted—a—to keep me in."

"So that was number two?"

"Yes, Crooky!"

"And you haven't tried again?"

"Well, my aunt Sheepskin, to whom I a—a—told the story, just as I've told it to you—a vary plucky old lady, you know—she advised me not to give in, but do, you know, as By-ron did, go on proposing till the girl accepted me. And that's what I mean to do. Only the davil of it is, Crooky, I want money so badly. My aunt Sheepskin says she can't a—a—fawk out any more—and so, a—a—I want to know, Crooky, if you can put me in the way of getting some."

"If it was the first, or the fiftieth time, Harry, perhaps I could give you a lift, or find somebody to do it. But you've such a lot of paper about."

"I shall take it all up, Crooky, as soon as I get the girl. Help me, like a good fellah, once more."

"I'll tell you what, Harry. I *do* know a man who might come down if the thing was well set before him. I'll see about it."

"Do—that's a good cree-char. Can you dine with me to-day at the Rag? No! Well, to-morrow, then. And in the a—a—mean time try and get hold of your man. I don't care how much he puts on it. There's Dangerfield. I've something particu-lar to say to him. Good by!"

From this conversation it appears that Alice Travers has not yet passed through the final ordeal at the instance of Lord Harry FitzLupus.

CHAPTER VIII.

A THRIVING PROFESSION.

In this great world of London, where Opportunity stands for so much, no one expects that people should willingly sit down without hope of change, particularly when any change must be for the better.

It is not, therefere, surprising that, in the affairs of Captain Cutts, some difference may be noted since last we saw that gallant officer—officer now no more, but, as he calls himself, "a professional man."

What his real profession is, it may not at the first glance be very easy to determine. Like his City friend, Mr. Ashley, he has apparently more than one; for, to judge by the outward signs of his house in May Fair, he is not only an "Auctioneer and Estate Agent," but a "Wine Merchant" also, and—if the brass-plate on the side door have any significance—a private gentleman into the bargain.

Of the estate-agency there ought to be no doubt, for the office-windows are lined with water-colour drawings, a little the worse for inconstant weather and the ravages of flies—purporting to represent some of "the most desirable residences in the kingdom." There figure castellated mansions approached by noble avenues,—gentlemanly abodes standing in park-like grounds,—quiet retreats, pleasingly timbered,—Italian villas commanding sweeping prospects,—Elizabethan cottages secludedly situate,—each an Elysium in itself, and all well worthy the attention of the wealthy capitalist, the keen sportsman, the retired merchant, or the simple country gentleman.

So you are told in the boldly-written descriptions which hang on the walls inside, and more than this—if you choose to waste your time in reading them: everything offered there is in a healthy and favourite neighbourhood,—the locality is always greatly improving,—the situation is central, or, at the worst, easily accessible,—the present tenants are of undeniable respectability—the investments are altogether most eligible, and possess the advantage of being peculiarly adapted to every possible requirement. The rhetoric of the auctioneer is, in short, utterly exhausted in these *affiches*, and if they "fail to convey an idea of the actualities themselves," the fault is in the English language, and in that alone.

Of the wine-merchant's calling the indications are not quite so prominently set forth, "a compact thing" being preferable, in the opinion of Mr. Cutts, to "a great flare-up of a business." And something very compact lies hidden, without doubt, in those cellars of his in the vaults under the chapel-of-ease round the corner. They stand him in a high rent, of course, but what is that, as he says, to the security of his ports. "A *cul-de-sac*, sir, for wine, in London, is worth any money!" Behind that railed-off partition Mr. Cutts only keeps a few samples in small transparent flasks, like physic-bottles; his "Stock" is "below, sir, below, down there, ever so far!" He is always ready to show it to every customer, but somehow or other "that infernal fellow," his clerk, has invariably gone out with the key. A few boards there are in the office labelled, as usual, "Pure St. Julien, 36s.,"—"Naked Amontillado, 42s.,"—"Dry sparkling Bouzy, 74s.," and so forth; but these afford only a very faint conception of the quantity of pure, naked, fruity, nutty, dry, sparkling, golden, choice, delicate, high-flavoured—he is almost tempted to say high-minded—vintages, which Mr. Thomas Cutts owns elsewhere. How he contrives to dispose of his enormous stock—for he tells you he is always "laying down" fresh quantities—is a mystery which can only be accounted for by one of two suppositions: he either gives away his goods, like those self-denying fellows the London linendrapers, or he throws them in as make-weights to complete transactions of a different nature. Perhaps if we were to knock at the private door and obtain for ourselves the pleasure of an interview with Mr. Thomas Cutts in his most private capacity, we might arrive at something like the truth in this matter, especially if one happened at the time to be very much in want of money, could offer good names as guarantees, and did not particularly object to pay sixty-five per cent. for the accommodation.

As the *penetralia* of Mr. Thomas Cutts have been named, let us realise the fact about knocking at the door,

and suppose that they are thrown open to ourselves or somebody else.

The breakfast-things are not yet removed, and, from the *débris* on the table, as well as from his personal appearance, the inference is that Mr. Thomas Cutts is now in the enjoyment of a great many more of the luxuries of life than when he haunted the White Horse at Pimlico, or picked up a precarious existence by late hours in Jermyn-street. On his fingers are several rings (formerly he had but one, and that of doubtful value), his shawl dressing-gown is of the newest Persian pattern, and he wears his purple-velvet Fez with the air of a man who has just made his fortune by means of the *Crédit Mobilier*, the Royal British Bank, or some other intensely thriving operation of modern contrivance.

But he is not alone in his glory. The honours of the scene are shared by one of the softer sex—by Mrs. Cutts, in fact—though, in more than one sense, she is anything but soft. Yet if she lacks that feminine attribute, she possesses others which she finds no difficulty in substituting. Without being exactly what is called "une grande dame," she understands perfectly well how to give herself airs; and in the art of setting people down, she is as skilful as a London cabman. You may call her uneducated if you like, but want of education has never been felt by her as any inconvenience: mother-wit has well supplied its place. Of her native tongue she has a perfect command, though she does not always use the choicest language, nor set much store by speaking it in its greatest purity; yet there are moments when, aiming at something like grace of expression, she does not disdain to borrow an occasional phrase picked up in foreign travel, of which she has seen a good deal. It would, perhaps, be censorious to say that she has no regard for truth; but even her best friends admit that she is a little—ever so little—disposed to romance. As to her personal habits, she is fond of show and expense, in her dress and in everything about her; but she gives to this inclination the name of "taste," the appropriate

adjective being suppressed. Although she affects to deplore the loss of her beauty, and calls herself a mere wreck, she has not entirely abandoned the belief that she has still some good looks left, nor is she altogether wrong. It is possible she may have made the most of her charms in early life, but under what circumstances, before she became the helpmate of Mr. Cutts, no one precisely knows. He could perhaps decide the question, but on that subject he is discreetly silent: there are antecedents of his own, of which, in all probability, his better half is not ignorant, and moreover, he is supposed to be, what is popularly termed, under the lady's thumb. Her union with "Cutts"—as she calls him, *tout court*—has familiarised her with many kinds of life, and when his condition has been at the worst, her genius has generally devised the means of putting him on his legs again. She is, in fact, by far the better man of the two, and to the daring of the male sex unites a disposition for intrigue, which, in point of *finesse*, essentially belongs to her own.

That Mr. Cutts places confidence in his wife is evident from their conversation.

"Is that from the Circus, Cutts?" asks the lady, turning her eyes for a moment from a gaudy parrot, which she is feeding, to a letter he has just put down.

"Yes, my love," replies her husband; "do you wish to see it?"

"I'd rather hear the contents. I never can make out Mr. A.'s handwriting. Read it!"

"There's not much to read. He's coming here to-day."

"About what, in particular?"

"The business I was telling you of last night."

"Will he advance the money?"

"Most likely. Though of course it depends upon what he thinks of the security."

"I wish he would, with all my heart, for I want a new shawl very badly. Indeed, I must have one. I saw

a lovely Kincob yesterday. Those Indian things are just my style."

"They do become you amazingly, my dear; is the figure heavy?"

"Never asked. Time enough for that when one's going to pay."

"Quite true, Kate. Well, I see no harm in your ordering one."

"Thankee, Cutts. I've done that already. And what's more, they've sent it home. You shall see it on presently and tell me how you like it. Don't scream so, Coco! I've no more to give you. I can't tell you, Cutts, how fond Coco is of these earth-nuts."

"As fond of them as you are of him."

"Not quite, for I wouldn't eat him, though parrot-soup is first-rate. That was what the poor dear old Markey de Klaque said when he gave him to me. You shall never want a dinner, madame, while you have that bird.'"

"He liked a good dinner himself, did the Markey."

"Yes, he was a complete Gastrom. He'd have made a capital cook."

"He was perfect, Kate, in one dish. No man could make a better *sauté*—that's to say, *sauter la coupe*"

"You're not bad at that, Cutts."

"I *can* do it, dear!"

"Yes, when standers-by are not too much on the *quivvy*. A little more nerve and nobody could top you. I wish you had Mr. Brunton's *sangfraw*, but people of your complexion——By-the-by, how is he getting on? I have not seen or heard of him for an age?"

"As to seeing Brunton, no more have I; but I hear of him now and then from Mr. A., who says he's doing very well."

"What does he call 'well?'"

"Oh, quite orthodox. Steady as a church. Regular City-man. There's a talk of his starting on his own account very shortly."

"How come Mr. A. to take to him in the way he did?"

"That's more than I can say, though I brought them together. It's not easy to account for everything Mr. A. does. But you may be sure he had some purpose of his own to answer."

"Most folks have, Cutts, if they are at all in earnest. But for that, the chances are we shouldn't have been so thick with Mr. A., nor he with us."

"It has been profitable, Kate, on both sides. I find the clients, and he the cash. Some of his customers little think when they buy his curiosities, that they do it with the money he has himself advanced. Not that it would make much difference to *them*. So long as they finger the coin, the deuce a bit do they trouble their heads where it came from. This Lord Harry, now, is one of that sort."

"Isn't he the very tall man we saw in one of the stage-boxes at Covent Garden, the other evening?"

"The same, Kate. Safer to find him there than in the House of Commons."

"Is he so fond of the draama, Cutts?"

"Fond, Kate, of the most attractive part."

"Je comprends. Who is the attraction?"

"The new Juliet, I fancy."

"What little Claribel? Who told you so?"

"Oh, a first appearance is always on Lord Harry's list, if she happens to be pretty."

"Indeed!"

Mrs. Cutts mused for a few moments, while her husband went on with the horse-column in the *Times*. Presently the lady spoke again:

"When do you expect Mr. A.?"

"At one o'clock."

"And Lord Harry and his friend?"

"At three."

"Very well. There will be plenty of time for me to get back. I want the brougham in half an hour. Don't

let Lord Harry go till I return. You must introduce him to me—in a chance kind of way."

"Where are you going, Kate?"

"Never mind. I know."

"And that, I suppose is enough for me. So be it! Have you any message for Mr. A.?"

"Yes. Tell him I am going to give a little party soon, and if he don't come himself, his girls must. Now ring and order the brougham."

Loan transactions are not of much interest to any but the parties immediately concerned. The conference between Mr. Cutts and his principal will, therefore, lose nothing by being left to imagination; neither will it advantage the reader much to know the terms agreed on with—on this occasion—the most punctual Lord Harry. There were, of course, a quantity of cases of champagne to be taken—some very choice specimens of rare old masters—a few hundred pounds' worth of shares in the safest of all speculations, the Conglomerated West of Ireland Peat-gas Company (unluckily, at that moment, at a discount, with "nothing" paid), and a *residuum* of cash which didn't quite come up to the borrower's expectations, considering the amount of bills which he gave in exchange. It was enough, however, Lord Harry trusted, to keep him going till he had made his *grand coup*.

"You have a pretty house, Mr. a—a—Cutts," said his lordship, looking round after depositing the bank-notes in his bocket-book; "a very na—ice thing, indeed, hasn't he, Crooky?"

Mr. Coates Taylor replied, with a smile, that the lines of Mr. Cutts always fell in pleasant places—and the auctioneer smiled in return.

"Small, my lord, small, but remarkable convenient. Perhaps your lordship would do me the honour to walk round the premises. I have a picture or two worth looking at. There is a Tintoret in my drawing-room which I will venture to say——"

Is it necessary to repeat what Mr. Cutts said about the Tintoret? Every man in England the owner of a square yard of spoilt canvas, says the same.

Lord Harry was in raptures, and Mr. Coates Taylor praised with discretion,—looking as if he praised.

"But the very best thing I have," continued Mr. Cutts, leading the way—"the gem, as I may call it, of my collection, is a small Titian in the drawing-room. Allow me my lord!"

He threw open the folding-doors as he spoke, and disclosed—a lady, who rose hastily from her chair.

"God bless me, my dear!" exclaimed Mr. Cutts, with well-feigned astonishment, "I thought we had the house to ourselves. Pardon me, my lord—Mrs. Cutts—Lord Harry FitzLupus, Mr. Coates Taylor—the picture I was speaking of——"

"A much more agreeable surprise than the a—a—finest Titian," said Lord Harry, gallantly. "Mr. Cutts was quite right! Quite a gem!—Pray don't leave us!"

"Really, my lord," replied the lady, curtseying, "I am so confused; I had no idea your lordship was in the next room. I have scarcely been here a moment myself." (She had been waiting in that Kincob shawl and marabout-feathered bonnet a full hour.) "Mr. Cutts begged me before I drove round the park to secure a box to-night at Covent Garden, and I just looked in to tell him it was quite impossible. There's not a place to be had for love or money."

"Which theatre did you say?" inquired Lord Harry, with something like animation.

"Covent Garden, my lord."

"Oh, ah! The new Juliet. She's delicious. Have you a—a—seen her?"

"Oh, dear me, yes! The young lady is a connexion of ours. Poor thing, she has very little time for society since she began to study for the stage, but whenever sh has a leisure hour this house is quite a home to Thank goodness the worst is over, and poor Cla

will be able to come to me now, I hope, very often. Will your lordship allow me to offer you some refreshment."

"None, thank you! What a charming a—situation!" he added, walking towards a window.

"A very fair look out for London," negligently remarked the lady.

"Oh, but it's quite bew-ti-ful,—perfectly in the country,—trees and grass—and a—a—birds'-nests and everything. Exactly the kind of house I should like to live in."

Here he turned round to the auctioneer, who was talking, *sotto voce*, with Mr. Coates Taylor.

"Do you wish to part with this house, Mr. Cutts?"

"Proud to oblige your lordship, but sorry to say it can't be done: clause in the lease, house and business go together.

"What do you say, Harry, to partnership with our friend?" asked Coates Taylor, laughing.

"No objection, I'm sure! If Mr. Cutts will stay below, I shall be quite contented up here."

One expressive glance at Mrs. Cutts was returned by that lady, who also claimed the privilege of speaking *sotto voce*, and said:

"Your lordship will be always welcome whenever you do us the honour of a visit."

"Most happy," said Lord Harry, bowing.

"We have lived so long in Paris," continued Mrs. Cutts, "that our habits are quite continental. I always receive of an evening. Music sometimes, occasionally dramatic readings. It was only to-day I was asking my sweet young relative, whom your lordship saw at Covent Garden, to come in a quiet way on some off-night and go through one of her parts. If your lordship is partial to that kind of entertainment——"

"Nothing in the warld I delight in so much," eagerly exclaimed Lord Harry; "my dear Mrs. Cutts—I will hold myself a—a—dis-engaged for any evening you are good enough to mention."

"I may send your lordship a note, then, when I know myself?"

"Depend on my coming."

Lord Harry FitzLupus and Mr. Coates Taylor then took leave.

When they got into the street, his lordship remarked to his friend, with emphasis,

"That's a dav'lish clevar woman, Crooky!"

"Very!" was the laconic reply.

"I can guess where you went," said Mr. Cutts to his wife, following the pair with his eye until they turned the corner. "I overheard your invitation."

Mrs. Cutts laughed and shook her head.

CHAPTER IX.

A MESALLIANCE.

LIFE is a series of compromises.

None are so placed as not to have been compelled—at one time or other—to accept with apparent willingness much that freedom of choice would unhesitatingly have rejected. There is a constant entanglement of motives, feelings, relations, interests, from which the most independent can never wholly liberate themselves. We are, in reality, so necessary to each other, that every attempt to trample down usage and establish a system apart from the universal law, ends only in more conspicuous failure, in a clearer exhibition of human helplessness.

This truth, taught by experience, seems often a hard one. Who does not sometimes think that had Circumstance—"that unspiritual god and miscreator"—been less inflexible, he might have shaped out for himself a brighter and happier career! Could he but have

aside all that was ignoble and compulsory in his earlier days, how different might have been the issue! A vain thought, except it assume the aspect of repentance, for it shuns the tests by which character is formed.

There are, however, conditions of existence which, if we cannot ourselves avoid, we may do our best to prevent those who come after us from enduring.

A thousand reasons are urged by the world against the contraction of misalliances, but that which ought to have the greatest weight—if ever reflection arose when passion filled the heart—is the consideration of the consequences entailed by them upon our children. On the man himself who contracts a greatly unequal marriage, the evil may fall with comparative lightness. He may have money enough to be able—to a certain extent—*to* defy opinion and to do without the world ; or he may be resolute enough to create or find "a world elsewhere." But subject him to the common accidents of life, let him prematurely die, and whether he leave wealth or poverty behind, he assuredly leaves an inheritance of difficulty, of mortification, and sometimes, it may be, of shame.

It wanted little to complete all these conditions in the case of the mother of the young actress who has been mentioned by the name of Claribel.

Mary Fellowes was the daughter of a small tradesman in a market-town in Hampshire. Of three sisters, who were reckoned the *belles* of the place, she was the youngest and prettiest, and if she did not marry before she was nineteen, it was for no want of suitors, either of her own class or some degrees above it. None, however, that offered were acceptable to her, and to the surprise of all she still continued fancy-free.

The period when she was in the zenith of her maiden beauty was the era of amateur stage-coachmen, and on the line of road which ran through Longfield there was no such accomplished whip as a gentleman about eight-and twenty years of age, who was called Mr. Page, though it was reported that he had been known in other parts of England by a different name, and some added,

though this might be only gossip, that he had borne a title. Of his having once moved in a very different sphere from that which he now occupied on the box of "The Wonder," there could be no doubt; his manners and conversation were those of one accustomed to the best society, and though all were charmed by his appearance, every one regretted that "such a perfect gentleman" should be so situated as to be obliged to drive a coach for his support. That this occupation was necessary to his existence was clearly shown by his taking the customary fee from the passengers, though it often happened that some of them from timidity, and others from meanness, would refrain from crossing his palm, till reminded in positive terms that he really was the coachman.

Mr. Page's personal appearance was strikingly handsome, and many a rosy smile—perhaps, at intervals, a sigh—greeted him along the road in the course of his daily transit. But there were no such smiles and no such sighs as parted the lips of Mary Fellowes. Up to the moment when "The Wonder" was expected—and at that moment it punctually arrived you could not doubt, had you seen her, how much of happiness consists in expectation; from the moment of the departure of "The Wonder," it was equally clear, to any who observed, that "joy's recollection was no longer joy."

As none could look on Mary Fellowes without a feeling of admiration, it follows as by no means strange that her beauty attracted Mr. Page. A few hurried words, while "The Wonder," was changing horses, sufficed, in the first instance, for conveying a meaning which Mary perfectly understood; but these brief salutations, dearly as they might be prized, very soon ceased to satisfy either. To the stolen glance and the whispered word, succeeded letters, and these were soon followed by meetings, in which all that had been but half revealed was fully and irrevocably declared. But if mystery shrouded the connexion, guilt had no share in it. Mr. Page professed a love as honourable as it was arder

and the end of the adventure was a private marriage, to which Mary's parents freely consented, the reasons urged by the lover being such as satisfied them of their expediency.

But what was kept a secret from Mr. Page's high connexions was none to the world in which he had cast his lot; there it was well enough known that Mary Fellowes was married to "the gentleman coachman;" and though it caused a considerable amount of heart-burning on a radius of at least twenty miles of road, the fact of the marriage was never contested, and Mr. and Mrs. Page lived happily and comfortably in a pretty cottage in a village close to the town which was the country terminus of his daily drive. In the intervals from occupation which Mr. Page was able to give to his beautiful young wife, he taught her by degrees to like much that for a long time he had neglected. In the quiet seclusion of domestic life, early habits and tastes were revived within him, and all he had once known he made it a labour of love to impart to Mary. She received his lessons eagerly, and her previous education having been a very fair one, considering her station, the progress she made was remarkable. Mr. Page bought her all the books for which he had money to spare—it must be confessed that they were chiefly works of imagination—and at the end of two years from her marriage, no one in all the country side was so familiar as Mary Page with the best English poets and dramatists. She had plenty of time for reading, her husband being necessarily absent during the greater part of the day, and the pleasure she had in displaying her newly-acquired knowledge on his return every evening was second only to that which she experienced in folding him again in her embrace.

A little interruption to her studies came at last, in the birth of her first and only child. Many a consultation had taken place before it was born as to the name it should be called by, the heroes of Byron and the heroines of Shakspeare being all severally marshalled, but finally the choice fell on none of these, for the new-comer, a

girl, received a name which figures only as that of a person mentioned, not represented. She was christened Claribel,—after the sister of Miranda's Ferdinand, "she that was Queen of Tunis." It was a name that sounded sweetly, and sweet and fair was the infant on whom they bestowed it. How fond her mother was of her!—but even her fondness seemed to fade into mere instinct before the idolatry of Claribel's father. His love for Mary Fellowes had been a new existence,—that which he felt for his child created in him another nature. He had often alluded to the hope he cherished of being able one day to conciliate his proud family and induce them to acknowledge his wife, but now he spoke with more emphasis, declaring his resolve to compel them at no distant day to recognise his daughter. He would relinquish the profession he had adopted, realise his share in "The Wonder," go abroad for a time in order that a veil might be thrown over the past, and when he had duly prepared his relations——

Why cite a proverb to show the folly of calculating upon what any one will do a year hence? In the midst of his projects—projects listened to with rapt attention—the hand of death fell suddenly on him. On the very last journey he had meditated, and when within a mile from his own cottage, his team took fright, "The Wonder" was upset, and Mr. Page, dashed with fearful violence from his box, was picked up a corpse!

Five-and-twenty years ago the newspapers did not dissect a dead man's history with their present keen avidity. The daily journalist, in want of a theme, did not then inevitably seize upon the accidental death of a man of rank to point a moral or adorn a tale. The inquest was of brief duration, and the proceedings were as briefly told. The paragraph which stated the melancholy fact was seen by hundreds who little knew the real name of the victim: even those of his house and lineage who read it, yawned perhaps as they turned to something more interesting—the latest state of the odds, or the newest scandal—so that the unfortunate cause

their *ennui* passed away with no record save the simple stone in the churchyard of the village where he died, which was raised by his sorrowing widow.

This unforeseen and dire calamity at once shut out from her all hope of ever realising the bright future which her husband had pictured. Unreconciled himself to his family, what chance was there that an unknown woman could move them to sympathy? Nevertheless, when the first violence of her grief had abated, a sense of what was due to her husband's child prompted her to write to the head of the house with which Claribel was so closely connected, and in doing so she entered into such particulars as would, she thought, fully establish her daughter's claim to recognition. She might have spared herself the trouble. No answer was returned. After a long and anxious interval she wrote again, and then an answer came. The writer "knew nothing of the person referred to in the impudent letter which he had just received," and warned Mrs. Page that "any renewal of her application would be met by the measures usually resorted to for the punishment of imposture."

Friendless and forlorn, the desolate widow had no alternative but submission to the hard fate by which she had been visited. Youth and elasticity of mind were, however, still hers, and the strength infused by maternal love. With these aids she prepared to live and bring up Claribel as best she might. Three years had elapsed since her marriage, and in the mean time both her sisters had left home. Kate, the eldest, after involving herself in more than one questionable flirtation, had "accepted a situation"—of what kind was never precisely stated—and gone abroad with a "separated" lady of rank; Harriet, more prudent in her conduct, had married in her own class, and now lived with her husband, a tradesman, in one of the suburbs of London. Mrs. Page, therefore, returned to her father's house, and remained there during the lifetime of her parents, striving by all the means in her power, and not unsuccessfully striving, to qualify herself to be her daughter's teacher.

At the expiration of ten years, the deaths of her father and mother, within a few months of each other, caused another change. Mrs. Page had neither the kind of ability that was necessary, or any desire to carry on their languishing business, and, stimulated by the vague hope that better prospects awaited her in London, readily yielded to the wish of her sister Harriet to remove t her neighbourhood. The confirmation or disappointmen of that hope she did not live to see. Within two year of her removal Claribel was again an orphan.

What the circumstances were which made her choose the stage as her profession have as yet to be told.

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CHAPTER X.

CLARIBEL.

It was a saying of Dean Swift's, that if you wanted to find the representatives of the oldest families of Ireland, you must look for them on the quays of Dublin; and the same remark holds good everywhere. Take all the pains you may to hedge in nobility, the fence must one day be broken down, and the illustrious seed be scattered. Lay the foundations never so wide and deep, raise the tower never so high, write "Esto Perpetua" on each broad front, and at the end of a hundred years—look for the edifice in vain! Countless causes lead to this result, defeating human pride and human precaution; but Time alone is a sufficient agent.

Ralph, Lord Basset of Drayton, was one of the noblest and most renowned of the band of knights who fought under the Black Prince. Of the thousands who read the name of Basset over the door of a small watchmaker's shop in Brompton, how many suspected that its owner was a lineal descendant of one of the heroes of Crecy?

And yet such was the fact, though plain John Basset knew nothing at all about it, nor would have been any the better for it if he had. He remembered his grandfather—which is more than a great many can say—but his dreams of ancestry never ascended beyond the old grey-headed cooper, who always gave his grandchild a new hoop when the boy was taken to see him. If the Basset family were proud of anything, it was not of an emblazoned surcoat or a Norman war-cry, but of the day when John, the husband of Harriet Fellowes, set up for himself in business, in the line in which he had served an honest apprenticeship; nor was it esteemed a derogation from his ancient lineage—of which nobody had ever heard—when he brought home a very pretty wife, after a holiday visit in Hampshire. Something more of pride might, perhaps, have accrued had children graced this union, but so legitimate a source of exultation was denied, and it was only from a natural cause that regret arose—not from the knowledge that in John Basset, watchmaker, a noble name would at last be extinct.

I have said that this name awakened no historical recollections in the minds of the multitude who carelessly read it—neither would any association with the days of chivalry have been suggested by the personal appearance or behaviour of John Basset himself. He was what is commonly called "a quiet, inoffensive man," of fragile figure and uncertain health, ingenious in the exercise of his calling, and unsparing of the labour he devoted to it, with a kind word and a kind thought for everybody, and the willing slave of a somewhat exacting if not imperious wife. She, also—though she lorded it a thought too much over the descendant of Black Edward's companion in arms—was not without good points in her character, uniting an affectionate disposition with a quick temper, and a desire to act rightly with a credulous and over-facile nature. A little more thrift would have been better adapted to her husband's slender gains; and had she cared less for amusement, she might have made him a more comfortable home.

There was a good deal of natural feeling in the impulse which prompted Harriet Basset to offer an asylum to her younger sister, when their father and mother died, but the irksomeness of being, as she said, "so everlastingly alone," had something to do with it: the increased expense never entered into her head. Nor need the latter consideration have proved a very serious one, if more prudent housewifery had been hers; but she had no notion of making retrenchments in things superfluous, to enable her with more ease to encounter things necessary. She was also under another influence. Greatly struck by the promise of Claribel's beauty, the idea of making "a lady" of her pretty niece at once took possession of her mind. Her proposition, framed to that effect, met with no opposition from Claribel's mother, and, indeed, it would have been of little use, for Harriet was as prone to govern as her sister to obey. Claribel was, therefore, sent at once, as a day-scholar, to the "first establishment" in the neighbourhood. It proved, in some respects, a good one, for certain accomplishments were really taught, where the money was paid for the teaching, and Claribel was so happily endowed by nature that no attempted improvement was wasted upon her. There was, however, a moment at which all her pursuits became a blank, when her first great sorrow—the loss of her mother—swept over her. The delight of repeating to the one gone for ever the daily acquirement which that one as delightedly listened to, was suddenly at an end. With what heart could Claribel learn more, when the exulting glance no longer shone, when the tender word which so fully rewarded every exertion was no longer spoken? This was her first thought; but then came the reflection that the kindness of her aunt deserved requital, for though at times her speech was sharp and hasty, affection, after her manner of displaying it, was at the bottom. What future, besides, had Claribel, save that which was shaped out for her by her mother's sister? To neglect her studies, even if she felt them a labour, would be ungrateful, and gradually she applied herself

to them again, if not with as much love, at least with as much perseverance, and at sixteen years of age the lady who conducted the "establishment" admitted that Miss Claribel Page was her most accomplished pupil.

Here was another thing to be proud of, if its achievement had been without alloy; but hard as the little watchmaker worked, ungrudgingly as he gave the produce of his industrious hours, the money which he earned melted more rapidly in his wife's hands than it was made by his. Not that he ever uttered a syllable of remonstrance or reproach when asked for what he began to find, on each occasion, a greater difficulty in supplying. At most he sighed or shook his head, but the demand was always met by his finding the money in some way or other.

One day he happened, by accident, to say as much, and his words were not suffered to fall to the ground unheeded.

"Some way or other, Mr. Basset!" exclaimed his irascible wife; "what other way is there than your going to the till for what I want?"

"I would go there with all my heart, Harriet," replied the meek husband, "only I am afraid there is nothing in it."

"Nothing in the till, Mr. Basset!" Nonsense!"

"It may be so, my dear, but it's very true."

"Then go to your banker; he has plenty, I hope."

"I hope so too, Harriet, but—but—my account is overdrawn."

"If that's the case you must sell out some stock."

"I never told you before, but I have been obliged to do that more than once already.

"You astonish me, Mr. Bassett. What on earth have you done with your money?

"I, Harriet?"

"Yes, you, Mr. Basset. I repeat—what have you done with your money?"

"Done!" returned the poor man, very innocently; "I have given it all to you!"

"Then, I suppose, Mr. Basset, you mean to tell me that I have been making away with your property—though, for that matter, what's your's is mine, if the marriage vow means anything at all—I, who never spend a single shilling that I'm not literally obliged to lay out! There are the house expenses, as close as I'm sure they can be kept—your living, your tailor's bills"—(you should have seen Mr. Basset's best coat—he was married in it)—"and I don't know what besides—the few things I want to make me and Claribel appear decent—merely decent, Mr. Basset—that poor girl's schooling—you wouldn't have her brought up in perfect ignorance, I hope, Mr. Basset—and when I *do* go out anywhere, which is seldom enough, God knows, and *always with orders if it's to the play*, don't I invariably take an omnibus as far as I can, or walk to the nearest cab-stand in order to avoid back-fare? And all the reward I get for my economy and forbearance and hourly sacrifices—yes, hourly—indeed I might say half-hourly—is a series of reproaches and accusations for wasting money! It's not to be borne, Mr. Basset, and I tell you plainly I won't bear it."

"My dear Harriet!" exclaimed the self-denying husband, as soon as he could get in a word, "don't distress yourself in this way; I really didn't mean to say anything of the kind—I'm sure I *couldn't* have said it."

"Mere words are nothing," retorted the lady; "it signifies not a straw what you said or did *not* say—you looked what you meant, and that's quite sufficient. I can understand a look, Mr. Basset, as well as any one."

Mr. Basset cast his eyes on the ground, and was silent.

"If there's anything I detest more than another," resumed the lady, after a brief pause, "it's a sullen temper. There you stand and never utter a syllable. If you won't speak, you might at least do something!"

"I'm thinking, Harriet, what it is I *can* do. The little stock we have left ——"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Mr. Basset, don't go over that ground again! I'm sick and tired of this subject.

Sell it out, and don't let me hear any more about it. What on earth is the use of having money if you can't get it when you want it?"

"Very well, Harriet, I suppose I must do as you wish."

"Oh, don't put it on me, Mr. Basset. It's not my advice. Please yourself. If you like to be a dog in the manger, *be one.* I can starve, and so can ——

The tears in her husband's eyes, and a quick sense of her own injustice, stopped Mrs. Basset in mid career.

"Well, well, my dear John, I didn't mean *that.* But you have such provoking ways, you force me to say more than I intend. Come, be a good man, and forget all about it, and then go and do what you have to do. There, I've quite forgiven you."

This pecuniary discussion—if that can be called discussion where the *animus* was all on one side—was the precursor of many like it, which all ended in the money being—"somehow or other"—raised. But the process was exhaustive. Mrs. Basset could not see how she was extravagant, did not diminish her expenditure—though she made a great flourish with cheese-parings—the watchmaker's supplies were gradually drained to their very source, and the worst thing happened that can befal a tradesman—or, indeed, anybody:—he got into debt.

An altered state of affairs necessarily arose, of which Claribel, who had now been withdrawn from the "establishment," could not long remain ignorant, even had her aunt practised any concealments, which she never did, priding herself upon her openness. To feel that her education had been too costly, to know that on her account expenses had been incurred which might otherwise have been avoided, caused Claribel the deepest pain. Was it not, however, in her power to remedy the evil to a certain extent? If she could not repay her aunt the money that had been laid out upon her schooling, the talents for which credit was given her, the accomplishments which she knew she had acquired, might be exercised in such a manner as to enable her not only to sup-

port herself, but, in her turn, to assist her relations. It was but to reverse the situation and go out to teach, instead of going out to be taught; there was more freedom, she thought, in such a life—more pleasure, she imagined, in such an occupation. If the fact of being a governess had at all corresponded with Claribel's abstract idea, nothing could have been more charming.

As it happened, however, she was not called upon to submit her pleasing theory to the disenchanting test of practice. Her aunt would listen to nothing of the kind. What! were four years' attendance at "the first establishment" in Brompton—equal to any in the kingdom—to end in nothing but making Claribel a teacher! Was she to throw away upon children all those qualifications for "the best society"—Mrs. Basset's dream without a chance of realisation—her French, her German, her Italian, her drawing, her music, the charm of that sweetest voice whether in speaking or singing! No! If the worst came to the worst—a favourite phrase with Mrs. Basset, as if she really were in the habit of considering *de longue main*—Claribel might become "professional,"—but a governess! Never!

In thus repudiating the more obvious mode of gaining a livelihood, Mrs. Basset had touched upon a chord which, almost unconsciously to herself, harmonised with her own predilections. A fondness for playgoing—with or without orders—was at the head of the amusements by indulging in which she had helped to lighten her husband's purse. Her estimate of a lady's position—and here, by chance, she was perfectly right—did not exclude that vocation which reaches fame by cultivating the most refined art in alliance with the highest genius, though the world only condescendingly admits the claims of its followers to stand on equal ground with others far less gifted. The idea of Claribel as an actress, if such a suggestion had been directly made, would not, therefore, have startled her, for the notion was shaping itself in her own mind long before she was aware of it.

An accidental circumstance caused its full development.

Although the little watchmaker was the last male descendant of the once illustrious house of Basset, it did not follow that he was altogether without kindred.

An old aunt, Mrs. Meggot, the last surviving sister of his grandfather the cooper, had lingered, like a winter apple on a leafless tree, long after all the rest of her family had departed. She possessed a little property, and, like all who have only a little, she magnified its importance in an excessive degree. Half-crazed on many points, though sane on the subject of money—the true test of sanity in the opinion of lawyers and others—she devised and bequeathed her *modicum* fifty times over. At one time she left it to a patient friend who had borne her cross-grained humours quite long enough to deserve it; at another, she named as her heir some cousin by her mother's side, whose ticket in the lottery of her regard was an occasional stubble-goose or sack of potatoes; then half a dozen public charities became, in their turns, the object of her posthumous solicitude; then hints were thrown out to tea-table gossips that they need not be surprised if, by-and-by, something were to happen to their advantage; and, finally, she wrote to her nephew John Basset to say that he would find she had not forgotten him when it pleased the Lord to take her.

Neither had she forgotten him nor anybody else whom she had ever spoken to or spoken of.

"She fulfilled all her promises, by making so many wills that, during the last few years of her life, it must have been her every day's amusement—"her custom always of the afternoon." If she had possessed as many thousands as she had left hundreds, the division would barely have paid the legacy duty, but fortunately for the majority they were saved the trouble of fighting for their shares, by the absence of a date to the respective documents in which they were interested.

This was not, however, the case with every one.

The day before she died—being then, to all appearance, as durable and tough as a certain octogenarian dame, concerning whom I, myself, have had expectations for the last twenty years—Mrs. Meggot paid a visit to the Treasurer of St. Trephine's Hospital; where she had once been laid up for thirteen weeks with a broken leg, and then and there, in the presence of two most respectable witnesses, a nurse and a dresser, bequeathed all her property to the aforesaid Treasurer, in trust for the Hospital, over which he had luck to preside, the blessings of that gentleman attending her—as far as the cab in which she drove away. From St. Trephine's Mrs. Meggot proceeded direct to her evening tea, at four o'clock, in the parlour of her best friend, Mrs. Hornybeak, and after a long and confidential talk with the estimable lady who bore that rather hard-sounding name—in the course of which three waters successively soaked the flabby tea-leaves—she summoned "the maid" who was hearthstoning the scullery, sent her for "the green-grocer" at the next door but one, and in the presence of these two parties signed and delivered, in favour of Mrs Hornybeak, a second will, similar in all other respects to that which she had executed at St. Trephine's. Nor was this all: the will-making mania being slightly in the ascendancy on that day with Mrs. Meggot—it is impossible to say whether the glass of hot gin-and-water, pressed upon her the last thing by Mrs. Hornybeak, acted as a stimulus or not—no sooner had she returned to her lodgings in Prad-street, Islington, than she quietly and deliberately sat down, and, skilled by daily practice in the preparation of such documents, drew out a third will, constituting John Basset, her brother's son's only child and her own dearly-beloved grand-nephew, her sole and universal legatee, to which paper she attached her signature, with the necessary date, Jane Growler, charwoman, and Peter Holiday, who dragged her about in a wheel-chair when her leg troubled her, being the attesting witnesses.

With a calm and satisfied mind, having doubtless

moved a great weight from it, Mrs. Meggot retired to rest that night, and never got up again, being found dead in her bed on the following morning.

With an expanding countenance and a stimulated sigh, the Treasurer of St. Trephine's duly announced to the Board, at the next day of meeting, the pleasurable but melancholy—of course melancholy—fact, that a grateful patient had remembered the Hospital in her will, and that he, as in duty bound, should take immediate steps to prove it.

With grim exultation, undiminished by the suddenness of "the blow," as soon as the news reached her that her dear friend, Mrs. Meggot, was defunct, Mrs. Hornybeak posted off to her lawyer to put herself in the same proving position.

With no great sorrow, certainly, but with a manner even more subdued than usual, Mr. John Basset communicated to his wife, on his return from Prad-street, Islington—whither he had been sent for to make the necessary arrangements for his aunt's funeral—that the paper which he placed in her hands would, he trusted, be the means of releasing them from all their present embarrassments, and—and—he hoped (could he help it if he spoke doubtingly?)—hoped—his dear Harriet would manage for the future to keep them clear when once they were so.

Mrs. Basset was too much overjoyed at beholding the confirmation of a statement which she had always disbelieved, to take exception to anything in her husband's observations.

"We must let the Doctor know immediately," she exclaimed. "But stay, he is coming here to dine today, as he wants to have a long evening to here Claribel read. He has a very great idea—but it's of no use telling you about plays, you don't understand anything about them. You're a very good creature, John, but the drama is not exactly in your line. If you haven't anything particular to do—indeed, I know you haven't—I wish you'd order in some Sauterne, and a few bot-

tles of claret—the Doctor can't drink any other wine;—I will look after the dinner and dessert myself."

John Basset quietly obeyed his wife's instructions, while she, in an almost unprecedented state of good temper busied herself for the reception of her guest.

Who was this critical "Doctor" with the delicate palate?

We shall see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

A DOCTOR OF LAWS.

WILLIAM BROCAS was the only son of a distinguished crown lawyer, a man of good family and estate in Hampshire. Designed for his father's profession, he went from Winchester to Oxford, where, notwithstanding tendencies adverse to study, he gained the reputation of an accomplished scholar, and eventually secured a fellowship. With a liberal allowance he then proceeded to the Continent, passing three or four years there, chiefly in France and Italy, and superadding to his classical attainments a profound knowledge of men and manners, on the one hand, and of Art and Science, on the other, which made him—when he pleased—as finished a gentleman as the grand tour of that day was capable of producing.

But the graces of scholarship, the polish of the courtier, and the refinement of the *connoisseur*, were not "unmix'd with baser matter." The intellect which had mastered so much learning could find pleasure in the company ot the most illiterate; the fastidiousness acquired in high society could be exchanged, at times, for unmitigated coarseness; the taste which should have exalted all his pursuits could be altogether forgotten in commerce with the meanest things.

It was not so much inclination, perhaps, that led him to exhibit these contrarieties of character, as a kind of perverse delight which he took in astonishing those who expected to find in him an entirely different person. To assume that any quality, whether good or bad, were a fixed principle of his nature, was a sure way of making him display its opposite. He was proud of his versatility, and would enact a part to the life, for the sole purpose of conveying a false impression: he cared nothing about the opinion you formed of him, in consequence, trusting always to the readiness of his wit and the speciousness of his arguments to redeem his position. He was not insincere withal, nor by any means devoid of kindness of heart, and about appearances—especially as they related to young women—he was a very prude: he could be careful of the reputation of others, but to all that concerned his own he was supremely indifferent. It was difficult to say whether he were naturally grave or gay, for he would pass without effort from the most serious subject to the lightest, from the exuberance of mirth to a frame of mind repulsively morose: one day you found him all cheerfulness—the next, all gloom—a human cameleon without the discoverable cause.

To one thing, however, he was constant: at no period of his life was he able to restrain his boundless extravagance. This fatal propensity had marked him amongst many while at the University; it had accompanied him wherever he travelled; and it failed to quit him when he returned to England to follow the profession for which he was destined.

It was a peculiarity in the character of William Brocas that the pleasures which he had so eagerly sought while abroad, did not give him a distaste for the studies which awaited him at home. On the contrary, they seemed to have inspired him with a keener sense of enjoyment in his revived pursuit, and he threw himself upon his books with as much avidity as ever he had manifested for an Italian *capo d'opera*, whether of music or painting. Within as brief a period as the "terms" of the law al-

lowed he was called to the bar, and deciding for the ecclesiastical courts, was soon afterwards admitted an advocate there, concurrently taking his degree as a Doctor of Law.

It was fully expected by all who witnessed the ardour with which he embraced the study of Civil Law, that Dr. William Brocas would soon become one of the shining lights of that branch of the legal profession which he had adopted, creating a name for ability second to none; and for a time it appeared almost certain that their expectations would be justified by the result. It depended, indeed, wholly upon himself what position he desired to occupy, for speedily the most intricate cases were confided to his judgment, and the honours of the profession came showering down upon him in the shape of Chancellors', Officials', and Commissaries' Appointments!

But while the current of his fortunes was thus setting towards the flood, the inconstancy of his disposition, and the irresistible attraction of living after his heart's desire, dragged him into an ebb from which there was no extrication. To be laborious was not a creed he was willing to adopt: he would work—while it suited him—as hard as any man, but was he at the same time to forego the habits that were with him a second nature? Had he not an inextinguishable love of art? were not poetry, and music, and painting necessary to his existence? what reward but that which they gave did he hope for in the completion of his toil? had he not money at his command.—and even when that was gone—for his father still lived, a hale old man—did not unlimited credit open her arms to receive him? Besides, he had already done enough, as he thought, for fame; the world had acknowledged his capacity, and if the world wanted his services it must wait upon his leisure. He who had never denied himself a gratification, who had youth and health in possession, and a long vista before him for their enjoyment, could not submit to the more than cloistral confinement of a life expended solely on the interests of others. Away, then, with the trammels that kept him

a slave when his soul panted to be free; welcome pleasure, welcome love!

He found them both, with their concomitants, satiety and disappointment—the last when his means were exhausted, his prospects irretrievably gone.

It was the old, old story, told of all who forsake a right principle and seek to place themselves above the conditions on which existence is granted. The end came, as might have been foreseen, perhaps as he foresaw it himself, for in acuteness he was never wanting, but, in the wilfulness of his heart, he did not hesitate to dare the worst.

The ruin of William Brocas was not, however, rapid; chiefly for the reason that he did not at once succeed to his inheritance. If the old man did not outlive his son's affections, he survived too long for his necessities, and, in the mean time, after spending all his own gains, William Brocas became a borrower wherever he could raise a guinea: his pen was in all the lender's books, his name a byword for need and extravagance. In this manner the time wore on, and when at last the paternal estate fell to him by natural succession, it passed at once into the hands of his creditors, and all that was left him to live on, besides the waifs and strays that came by occasional bequests, was the income arising from his college fellowship. It was a miracle, almost, that he had not deprived himself of that, for marriage had more than once tempted him, and however lucrative the temptation might have proved, the money acquired that way would assuredly have gone the same road as the rest.

But he was saved from marriage by love: in what manner no one exactly knew, for the subject was involved in mystery. He would sigh, when the fit was on him, and speak of Her;—but who she was, and under what circumstances he had formed the connexion, he never by any chance revealed. She might have been a wife, who had left all for him—she might have been a maiden, who gave him her first and last affection: in either case he remained true to her memory—for death

had parted them—and the only property of which he steadfastly refused to dispossess himself—it was not intrinsically of much value—was the cottage in which latterly she had lived and died. It was a place fashioned after his own taste, a sort of Paradise of dainty devices, and she had bequeathed it to him with all her books, her household ornaments, her harp, her drawings, everything her hand had touched, and all of which remained sacred from the touch of others. Perhaps amongst the varying moods of William Brocas, this recollection alone excited him to genuine feeling: there was no room for doubting the seriousness of his thoughts when Her image was conjured up before them, and on occasions of this kind he would shut himself up for days, and give way to agonies of unrepressed sorrow.

Such accesses of grief were not, however, frequent. In general he wore the air of a laughing philosopher,—laughing at times somewhat bitterly at the shrewd turns of fortune, but for the most part bearing her buffets, or seeming to bear them, with an unruffled mind. His was a temperament which would not suffer his faculties to lie dormant, and the legitimate application of his talents being debarred him (he had relinquished the law for all practical purposes, and she never wooed him back again), he was driven to exercise them in scheming for his daily bread.

But the daily bread of such a man as William Brocas implied every description of attainable luxury, and he employed more ingenuity in endeavouring to live *en grand seigneur*, than would have sufficed to build up a dozen fortunes on a basis of simple respectability. A difficulty with Dr. Brocas was only a comparative evil, as he always contrived to get out of it; if not by a skill that was really marvellous, at all events—and as a *dernier ressort*—by the bold expedient of getting into a difficulty still greater. To rob Peter in order to pay Paul might have been the motto of his adoption but for one slight circumstance: rob Peter as he would, Paul never got paid.

You were, therefore, never quite certain, for any length

of time, the "whereabout" of Dr. Brocas. You looked for him in Camden Town when he had been living for six months at Brixton; you heard that he had taken a house at Holloway, but you failed to find him there, for the simple reason that he had removed to Kensington. He called this ubiquitous tendency a passion for taking houses; he would have spoken more truly had he described it as a passion for taking in householders. As a matter of course, his domestics found that service with Dr. Brocas was no inheritance. The master who was continually moving was also always changing. In one particular only did he exhibit any steadfastness: wherever he went he was accompanied by the same housekeeper. For this he had two reasons: in the first place, it was respectable, and cast a reflected ray of respectability on his establishment; in the next, Mrs. Turner had been the favourite servant of Her whom he mourned. A strong tie of attachment united Dr. Brocas and Mrs. Turner, and this kept them together, for she was a plain-spoken woman, correct and honest in her personal character, who often quarrelled with and reproached her master for proceedings she could not but condemn. Dr. Brocas, conscious of her rectitude, bore with her reproofs; and she, subdued by his penitence and promises of amendment, and attracted, moreover, by his good-humour and careless generosity, never fulfilled her oft-repeated threat of leaving him altogether.

At the period when Mrs. Basset was expecting the promised visit of Dr. Brocas, he was living in a pretty villa on the banks of the Thames at Fulham. Their acquaintance had originated accidentally, through one of the erratic proceedings of the learned civilian. Going into London on business one day, he passed John Basset's house, and looking up by chance from his Horace or his Tasso, without which he never entered his carriage, he saw Claribel at one of the windows. A pretty face was always an attraction for Dr. Brocas, and that of Claribel was strikingly beautiful. It haunted him all the morning, occupying his thoughts the whole time he was en-

gaged with his lawyer, who inwardly remarked that he had never seen his client so *distrait;* and when he turned his horses' heads westward, he was far less intent on the project for raising money which had taken him into the City, than on the newer one of learning who Claribel was, and what her condition.

After considering one or two schemes for gaining admission to the private part of John Basset's dwelling, he decided on his plan. Taking out his watch, he overwound it so sharply as to break the main-spring, and then pulling up suddenly when opposite the watchmaker's door, got out of his carriage and walked in. John Basset, with his magnifying-glass screwed into his eye, condoled with his customer about the accident to the old family repeater, and this led to a dissertation on the part of its owner, which he soon improved into a familiar conversation. Suddenly he stopped short—he was taken ill—he felt faint—could he have a glass of water? The unsuspicious watchmaker was all alacrity; he assisted the gentleman into the dining-room behind the shop, he looked about for water, he rummaged for the keys, he called to Mrs. Basset to come down. The lady made her appearance, the Doctor, recovered by restoratives, was profuse of thanks; but, although considerably better, he did not attempt to go away. To interest Mrs. Basset was his object, and he was too accomplished a courtier to fail. It was wonderful with what ease he glided into her way of thinking, how adroitly he discovered her *penchants*, how subtly he ministered unto and encouraged them. In one brief hour Dr. Brocas and Mrs. Basset became as intimate as if they had known each other all their lives: she told him all that related to her family history, and he told her—all he thought proper to reveal. Of Claribel he never said a word, though her name was several times mentioned by her aunt, with repeated aspirations for "the sphere" which Mrs. Basset's imagination—mingling with vague recollections of Claribel's father—

pictured as her niece's proper one.

What was the object of Dr. Brocas in making this acquaintance?

Even he could scarcely have answered the question beyond acknowledging "a romantic interest in the welfare of an unknown girl." He repeated this over a hundred times to himself, for with all the experience he had gained he was still accessible to romance, and believed what he said. It must be told to his credit that nothing base or unworthy, with Claribel for their object, entered his thoughts, either then or afterwards, when he came to see her aunt as a frequent guest, or to ask her to visit him. In telling Dr. Brocas what she knew of her sister Mary's marriage, Mrs. Basset had excited his curiosity, and this feeling, as he grew to know the beautiful girl, deepened into one of interest. Had he really possessed the fortune which had once been his, and of which he always talked as if it were one day to return, he would without hesitation have adopted her as his heir; as it was, he busied himself in constant plans for her advantage, and in more than one particular he rendered her essential service. However admirable the education imparted at "the first establishment" in Brompton, there were many deficiencies which shocked his sensitive taste, and these he laboured assiduously and successfully to remove. With a perfect pronunciation of French and of Italian, with a critical knowledge of the best works in both languages, and with a decided talent for declamation, nothing delighted him more than the task of teaching Claribel the arts in which he himself excelled. Towards her his manner was always frank and kind—even when he sometimes scolded. If he indulged in *persiflage* with her aunt, or chose—as was often the case—to make her the victim of some impromptu mystification, he never practised on Claribel. Upon her he turned only the bright side of his nature, and it was little wonder, therefore, that she listened to him with attention, and repaid his care with affection.

An open-mouthed woman like Mrs. Basset could not be long with such a companion as Dr. Brocas without revealing her domestic troubles—the troubles, she forgot to say, which were chiefly caused by her own mismanagement. There was no need to enlighten one so shrewd as he on this point, but it was not his cue to play the reformer even had his vocation lain that way—which it did not. In Mrs. Basset's extravagance he recognised, in a small way, something akin to his own, and *pococurante* as he was, allowed her to swim with the stream of her own inclination.

But he was ready enough to assist. With all his faults, good-nature was one of his attributes, and perceiving the straits into which the little watchmaker was driven, would have helped him with money, but that was a thing impossible—so impossible, that he had not yet been able to pay the bill for mending the damaged repeater. Pondering over Claribel's position, impressed by her beauty and talents, and fully alive to the *éclat* attendant upon a great success, he came to the conclusion that all the gifts which graced her would be wasted, unless she went upon the stage.

He sounded Claribel about it. Young, ardent, enthusiastic, and eager to repay—as far as she could—the benefits she had received, she was fascinated by the poetical aspect of the subject, and entered into it with heart and soul. Nor was any objection raised by Mrs. Basset; on the contrary, the idea pleased her, and she gave it full encouragement.

Hence the dramatic readings, the first of which, in a formal shape, came off on the day when Mrs. Basset set herself so assiduously about the preparation of dinner; —when, complacently sipping his claret, with balanced hands and approving nods, with a judicious suggestion here and an earnest commendation there, Dr. Brocas delightedly listened to the eloquent accents of his beautiful pupil. Mrs. Basset was proud of the result; the little watchmaker was awe-stricken; he had never suspected

before that Claribel, of whom he was so fond, was a genius—and he hardly knew what to make of it. But his wife and Dr. Brocas did. Claribel read on: she mastered several parts; Mr. Wimple, the manager of Covent Garden, was induced by the persuasion of Dr. Brocas to go to Brompton to hear her; he approved, and Claribel came out. No false prediction had prejudged the issue—every voice was loud in her praise, and Claribel was proclaimed the actress of her day, with something, it is true, to learn, but with nothing to overcome that was not within the reach of her ability.

Besides Dr. Brocas and Mrs. Basset, another person came forward to share in Claribel's triumph.

A few months before she became the public theme, and while yet in her studious apprenticeship, Mrs. Basset's elder sister, Kate, transformed during her long absence abroad into Mrs. Cutts, reappeared on the scene—none knew from whence. But she had means at her command, and though she would not have given a sou in aid of any other object, she freely opened her purse for dress and decoration when she learnt her niece's destination.

Long-sighted Mrs. Cutts!

That at least may be said of her, if she deserves no other praise.

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CHAPTER XII.

A MERCANTILE MOVE.

It was high noon in the City, and, for a brief space, the external signs of business-operations were suspended, to admit of that recruitment of the physical forces which even City nature—eager though it be in the pursuit of gain—cannot entirely do without.

It was high noon within the Royal Exchange, and the

statue of Queen Victoria, with the black patch on its cheek, was left alone in grimy majesty, the arcades hung with advertisements being untenanted save by a curious few who took advantage of the emptiness of the place to peep, with pockets unpicked, at the stereoscopes which liberal-minded photographers have affixed to the pillars there.

It was high noon at "The Baltic," and its frequenters, the most adventurous of all the London speculators, had ceased for the moment to muster in the dark catacomb which they call their mart: the iron wicket was unguarded—the shipping-lists were neglected—watchful eyes no longer peered into the patches of looking-glass which cover the walls, to draw conclusions from bright or gloomy countenances reflected across the room—the waiter's cry had superseded the usual hubbub of voices which daily make themselves heard in all the languages of Europe—and a pause had taken place in the transactions that make or mar so many. Ah, if every bargain concluded at "The Baltic"—to say nothing of those that take place in its Capel-court rival—could see the light, we might then, perhaps, learn the reason why Fungus, who began life upon nothing, now lives in splendour; why Bloater, once "good for a hundred thousand," hung himself one evening—behind the door—after a heavy fall in tallows. If that bust so conceitedly perched beneath the lantern could open its jaws, like Friar Bacon's head, its revelations might make the subscribers distrust each other still more than they are already disposed to do.

But besides the time of day at the places named, it was high noon at "The North and South," where the brazen Cock tops the house front with as much audacity as if he, too, had just made a fortune next door. But mid-day at "The North and South" means business of a different kind from that which goes on at "The Baltic," and mercantile haunts of that description. There men meet to devour each other; at "The North and

South" they congregate to devour turtle-soup and ox-tail, chops, steaks, salmon, Stilton,—all the fat of the land, as City men interpret it,—or more parsimoniously to mumble biscuit and swallow sherry, tossing up sovereigns afterwards to see who shall pay; some of them chance customers only, others so regular that at last they become part and parcel of the locality.

The most constant among this class of visitors was Mr. Julius Browser, of the firm of Temple Travers. He had used the house as a refectory for the last five-and-thirty years, and he hoped—though at sixty, with an apoplectic tendency, the thing was not likely—he hoped to do the same for five-and-thirty years to come. Habit had made Mr. Julius Browser so wondrously expert in getting through his meal, that his fellow-clerks scarcely missed him when, to use his own phrase, he "took his hat for a minute;" but brief as the interval might be which he devoted to his stomach, he not only contrived to fill that somewhat ample receptacle during his absence, but was able at the same time to pick up the news of the day, or impart his own to the cronies he fell in with. It is scarcely necessary to say that what Mr. Browser and his friends called "news," would not have fetched a very high premium at the clubs in Pall Mall; but as a set-off to that fact it may be stated that—unless it bore upon "business"—the Pall Mall clubs might all of them have ceased to exist, for anything that Mr. Browser and his friends—who passed for being tolerably humane—cared about the matter.

At the hour in question, and in the accustomed corner, Mr. Browser—who always went in for his dinner, that he might sup by-and-by with the better grace, having despatched his second plate of roast mutton, his "brockiloes," two of his "breads," and half his pint of stout—was waiting, somewhat impatiently, for his marrow-pudding, before he wound up with his cheese and his celery—on which vegetable, in season or out of season, he every day made the same joke—when hungry-looking

Mr. Grimes, of the firm of Bullion Brothers, whose appetite by no means belied his aspect, entered the same box.

"How do, Grimes?" said the *habitué*, with a sparkle in his eye, the marrow-pudding having arrived with the new comer—"how do, Grimes?"

"How do, Browser? Biled and greens!" The last remark was addressed to the waiter as Mr. Grimes sat down to dine with his hat on, following therein his friend's example.

"Anything stirring?" asked Mr. Browser, endeavouring to cool a spoonful of smoking pudding by blowing on it.

"Catt and Carver gone," replied Mr. Grimes, rubbing his hands as if the news was pleasant.

"Heavy?"

"Sixty-five thousand, they say."

"Overdone it, I suppose?"

"Yes,—in linseeds. Bought largely at seventy-seven."

"What are they at now?"

"Fifty-one."

Mr. Browser blew again: it was in lieu of an exclamation this time, for the marrow-pudding had all disappeared.

"Couldn't stand that, of course," pursued Mr. Grimes, with his mouth full, his portion being now before him.

"I should think not," returned Mr. Browser. "Hello! waiter, where's my salary? Can't get any over the way, Grimes,—house can't stand it any longer!"

This was Mr. Browser's diurnal joke. When Grimes was not there, he executed it upon the waiter, or upon any stranger within earshot, and it always made Mr. Browser laugh till his face was as red as beetroot.

"Have *you* any news?" inquired Grimes, who was case-hardened, and with good reason, against his friend's facetiousness.

"I believe I have," answered Mr. Browser, wiping his eyes. "You've not heard of it?"

"Heard of what?"

"About us?"

"Come, Browser, don't come that twice a day. I can't stand it."

"I ain't a going to. I'm in earnest this time."

"Well, what is it?"

"Why, our Mr. Brunton is going into business on his own account!"

"What! leaving your firm! I thought, from what you told me, he was more likely to be taken into the concern. He must be mad, Browser!"

"I should say so too, Grimes, of anybody else. But that young man has a head, and a long one. If you'd seen him work as I've done, and heard him talk as I've done, you'd be of my opinion."

"Work and talk, Browser?"

"Ay, Grimes. 'Talk,' after work's over. Such views, Grimes! Such ideas! When he comes out with me sometimes of an evening to my little place at Camberwell, I can listen to him by the hour."

"What does he talk about?"

"Everything. There isn't a subject, home or foreign, that he's not familiar with. Our Mr. Velters, though he keeps his thoughts to himself as close as our strongest safe, will be sorry enough to part with him, I can tell you."

"What makes him go, then?"

"As I said before, Grimes, he wants to set up for himself. There's Napoleons in all bisnesses. Some *will* be masters. He's one. Why, it's not two years since they put him under *me*, to teach him! He pretty soon learnt all I knew, and a doosid deal besides. No, Grimes, Mr. Richard Brunton wasn't born for a life of servitude,—not that I should call it servitude being a junior partner,—on the contrary,—but *he* does."

"What line is he going into?" asked Mr. Grimes.

"The produce line."

"How about capital?"

"Oh," returned Mr. Browser, in a tone rather less firm and decided than he had previously employed in speaking of his admired pupil, and having, no doubt, some cause for hesitation,—"he's got—some; quite enough, he says, to begin with; and then, you know, he has the good word of our house, which is no trifle."

"As good as money in the City,—and that means everywhere," said Mr. Grimes.

In this manner,—*entre poire et fromage*,—Mr. Browser related the change in Richard Brunton's mercantile position, and the wiser few to whom Mr. Grimes repeated the news wondered, like him, why he should give up such a situation as that which he held in the house of Temple Travers for, at best, an uncertainty: the many, however, including all the gentlemen who made fortunes at "The Baltic," or lost them there, declared he was perfectly right, and applauded him for a man of spirit.

In the abstract, the step he had taken, or was about to take, seemed hazardous, if not imprudent. Standing high in the opinion of his employers, extensively trusted with a knowledge of their affairs, and the road to his advancement opened, a more than ordinary motive must have influenced him in determining on a separate career. Was it owing to the advice of Mr. Ashley, who might, perchance, have become anxious to realise the ten thousand pounds for which Brunton had given his bond by a quicker process than waiting for its accumulation by careful saving? Hardly so;—for had Brunton been unwilling to leave the firm of Temple Travers, that sum, large as it was, might probably have been advanced by them to keep him there, after a full explanation of all the circumstances which rendered that loan necessary. Perhaps that was where the shoe pinched! *Could* Brunton have explained to the satisfaction of Mr. Velters? Was his indebtedness to Mr. Ashley a subject for explanation to any one? Was it perfectly clear, besides, the

Richard Brunton had the disposition to save for the purpose of repayment? And, after all, did Mr. Ashley press him for money, or urge him to the course he proposed to take?

These were questions which none but himself and Mr. Ashley, who alone was in the secret, could answer.

What he chose to tell Mr. Velters was, that he desired to found a house of his own, that he knew himself possessed of an aptitude for a particular line of business distinct from that of the firm of Temple Travers; and in saying this he did not depart from the truth, for, whatever might be under the cards, ambition was busy within him, and that eagerness in the pursuit of wealth which seeks the shortest cut to fortune. In the service of the great City firm he had learned much that would hereafter prove of the greatest use, and issuing thence, he started with a *prestige* which under no other circumstances could have been acquired. He trusted, too, that—morally—there would be no severance from those towards whom he entertained, as he said, a veneration, which would endure to the close of his existence. Mr. Velters, inaccessible on the side of mere sympathy, listened with complacence to the respectful words of Richard Brunton, and gave him to understand that the light of his countenance would not be withheld,—a gracious condescension which was acknowledged with the profoundest demonstrations of humility.

Nor was his withdrawal unnoticed by the elder Mr. Travers, who was not ignorant of the zeal and ability which the young clerk had displayed. When he heard of the object he had in view he sent for Brunton, and, after a few words of commendation, presented him with a cheque for a thousand pounds, and added to the value of the gift by the assurance of his friendship. "I am," he said, "an old man, Mr. Brunton, and you are a young one; it is not probable, therefore, that I shall live to witness your full career, for time is the only test by which success in affairs can be measured; but, as long

as it is given me to stay, I shall mark your progress with satisfaction, and be happy on all occasions to see you here, to offer advice if necessary, assistance if it should be required."

Why should these words of kindness have excited a feeling of compunction in the breast of Richard Brunton? Surely it ought to have been one of gratitude alone.

But if such a feeling arose it faded as it came, and when Richard Brunton took leave of Mr. Travers, "his heart within him was not changed."

A month after this interview the names of "Brunton and Co., Colonial Brokers," figured conspicuously on the door-post of one of the principal houses in Mincing-lane.

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CHAPTER XIII.

A GREAT MAN'S INVITATION.

RICHARD BRUNTON was not like the timorous servant who kept his money laid up in a napkin. What he possessed he put at once to profitable uses, though had he relied upon capital only, it would not, perhaps, have carried him very far. But the thousand pounds which Mr. Travers had given him, added to certain other two thousand, willingly advanced by Mr. Browser—who, confident in the genius of his young friend, did not hesitate to place the savings of five-and-thirty years in his hands—made up an amount which, as times go, seems almost too much to have begun with. There are so many, now-a-days, who start with nothing but the metal of which some statues and themselves are made, that really the fact of Brunton's going into business with the sum of three thousand pounds—and only two-thirds of it bor-

rowed—was enough to establish him in the public mind as a man of first-rate respectability.

Not that the public knew whether he had much or little—they never do know until it is too late—but they saw that he was disposed to deal largely; they believed that he was backed by the great house in which he had passed his noviciate, and Brunton himself making the most of the late connexion, they gave him credit in every acceptation of the term, and he flourished accordingly.

The firm of Brunton and Co. soon, therefore, became known on all the markets. In that name figured exports and imports of all kinds. Ship-loads went out and came in with all sorts of marketable commodities consigned to and consigned by them. The counting-house of Brunton and Co. was a Babel re-echoing with the names of articles of produce which sounded sweetly in the mercantile ear, never wearied of Argol and Cutch, of Aloes and Ashes, of Hemp and Bristles, of Horntips and Jalap, of Gum and Copperas, of Juice and Jute, of Hides and Horse-tails, of Manes and Combings, of Oil-cake and Rosin, of Pumice-stone and Whale-fins,—of anything growing under the earth or produced above it that is convertible into cash. Very pleasant, too, there, on the lips of trade, were the words that picturesquely told how Goosery (which means sugar) had been neglected; how Moonghy and Ballam (which mean rice) had been inquired after; how bold Calicut (which means ginger) had remained firm; how Scrivelloes (which mean ivory) had advanced; how blocky Copals were heavy; how Garblings were weak; how salted Greenland was steady, how Wigs were dull and depressed, Blue-back quiet, and Small Pups extremely lively (these three latter articles standing for sealskins); how black Sumatra (meaning pepper) had gone off with animation; and how (as to sugars) there was nothing doing in crushed, but that common brown lumps were in very brisk demand. To the outer barbarians, who understand

nothing of making rapid fortunes, this language is a mere unintelligible jargon, but to the initiated of Mincing-lane, skilled in the accumulation of coin, it expresses all that a man need trouble himself to think about—that is to say, if he knows how to turn it to the right account.

Richard Brunton knew this—and something more—and so he went on, prospering.

As every man's merit in this world is measured by his success, it would have been strange if that of Brunton had been overlooked. Such was not the case: he was spoken of far and near, and always in terms of commendation. Even the coat of mail in which Mr. Velters was enveloped was not proof against so much good report, but had open links through which it penetrated; and one day, after a very satisfactory interview with the rising produce-merchant, he condescended so far as to give him an invitation to pass the interval between business-hours, from Saturday till Monday, at his country place at Broadstone.

If to pick and choose his own especial pleasure had been left to Brunton, it is doubtful whether he would have selected the mansion of Mr. Velters as the scene of his Sunday recreation, for he had tastes which were not those of his quondam principal, and what he had heard of Mrs. Velters was not particularly encouraging: a lady who is all science is not exactly a relaxation. But other considerations influenced him which had more weight than his own temporary amusement, and he eagerly, though with all due humility, accepted the stately invitation. He had found out, through some channel of communication with those who lived in the old house in Broad-street—perhaps from a casual remark by Mr. Browser, or in some other quarter—that there were guests at that moment at Broadstone whom, of all others, he was desirous of meeting.

However faithful to his agreement with Mr. Ashley, no matter what it bound him to, he had also made a

compact with himself, and that related to Miss Temple Travers.

Since the day on which he first saw her in the private room of Mr. Velters, his most carefully-hoarded thought had her for its object.

Every man's career is full of seeming impossibilities. Brunton believed, without the poet's aid, "that nature fram'd all women to be won," and to win the hand of Alice Travers, impossibility as it appeared, was the ambition he most encouraged.

Two years before and he was almost an outcast in the public streets of London, with a debtor's or—temptation not withstood—it might be a felon's gaol yawning before him. Who that had predicted his present position would for a moment have been listened to?

He had gained reputation: he was in a fair way of gaining wealth. What more had they done to whose alliance he aspired?

Was want of birth an impediment? Possibly: for those who have made themselves, generally aim at founding dynasties. But as everyone takes a rose-coloured view of his own case, Brunton soon set this consideration aside, fortifying his hopes by a thousand well-known examples, and coming back to the point from whence he had started—that, certain opportunities granted, there was nothing in the world which might not be subdued by Will, and that, of all obstacles to overcome, the slightest was a woman's inclination.

He may have been right or wrong in his general conclusions, but it was a bold theory to entertain with such a girl as Alice Travers. Of the antecedents of her life, of the complexion of her mind, he knew nothing; he only guessed, in these respects, at what he wished. Enough for him that she was still unmarried; he argued from thence that she remained unmoved. To awaken her interest in himself must be his task.

Such were the thoughts that occupied Brunton on the railway journey to Broadstone, with Mr. Velters, who

always buttoned up both mind and body when he travelled, for his silent *vis-à-vis*; though could the managing partner of the great house of Temple Travers have read what was passing in the mind of his companion, he would neither have been silent nor long his *vis-à-vis*.

What, indeed, would he have read?

That Richard Brunton had cherished, for two long years, an ardent passion for the only daughter of the head of the commercial world? That this young man, this nobody, whom a breath, as it were, could sweep from the face of the earth, as a gnat is swept from a pane of glass, had dared to raise his eyes to the richest heiress in England.

Something of this sort Mr. Velters might have discovered: if not "the ardent passion," which in truth had no existence, at all events the daring presumption by the aid of which he hoped to reach the highest round on Fortune's ladder.

But Mr. Velters, looking straight before him, saw only the reflexion of his own important image: the contemplation of that object, when his attention was not demanded by business, sufficed for all his desires.

This complete self-absorption did not, however, continue to the journey's end. At the station about a couple of miles from Broadstone, the private carriage of Mr. Velters was in waiting to convey him home; and after it had entered his own lodge-gates and was traversing his park—the country appendage of every London banker—he deigned to intimate to his companion that there were visitors at Broadstone.

"You will have the honour of meeting Mr. Travers, Miss Temple Travers, and her friend—that estimable lady—Miss Nalders."

Brunton bowed, and replied that the expected honour was a very great one: he was no less proud to think that he should be made known to the family of Mr. Velters.

The habits of his life had caused The Managing Partner

to set The House on the highest pinnacle that his imagination could conceive, but next in altitude to that sublime elevation he placed himself and those immediately belonging to him, and he therefore received Brunton's compliment with a greater degree of complacency than he had ever exhibited towards him. He unbent, indeed, so far, during the rest of the drive, as to point out some of the natural beauties of his "place"—directing Brunton's attention to the happy undulations of the ground, the well-grouped masses of foliage, the picturesque effect of the piece of water in which his house was mirrored, and the noble avenue that led up to it; and he spoke of these things—as landed proprietors sometimes do speak—as if he, Mr. Velters, had created the hill and dale, and wood and water, instead of having not long before acquired it all by purchase: he did, however, admit—but this was only another tribute to himself—that "the property" had cost him a hundred and eighty thousand pounds.

Happy man, Mr. Velters! But happier he who, with Alphonse Karr, can say: "La propriété est un piége. Ce que nous croyons posséder nous possède. Moi, je suis libre depuis que je ne possède rien. En vain on plante de bornes, on bâtit des murs, on hérisse les champs de haies épineuses ; on n'empêche jamais les champs, les bois et la nature d'appartenir aux poëtes."

But neither Mr. Velters nor Richard Brunton were poets. What the one had and the other desired to have, was something tangible, positive, their own—something that could be bought and sold: the rest was a chimera. Their sentiments agreeing so well, Brunton's praise was unreservedly given, the purchase-money coming in for a large share of his approbation.

"It is a magnificent property, sir," he said, "and you gave a magnificent sum for it. A hundred and eighty thousand pounds, sir! There are not many who could write a cheque like that, and not feel it!"

Really, when the carriage drew up at the principal entrance to Broadstone—so it was simply called, as if the

neighbouring village had no existence—the manner of Mr. Velters was almost cordial.

If the architecture of Broadstone had not been as severe as the mind of its present owner, it is quite certain that it would not have fixed Mr. Velters. Broadstone was an eminently classical building, and might almost have been mistaken for a town-hall or a country hospital, with its inevitable portico and many-windowed façade. Mr. Velters observed to Brunton, as he led the way up the five steps which gave so much dignity to his abode, that the house was looked upon as Brownson's *chef d'œuvre;* which might very well be, since Brownson—who once obtained a premium for designing a lunatic asylum—was never known to have built anything else. The classical style prevailed within as well as without the mansion—classicality allied to science—for, alternate with the busts and groups that made you shiver in the height of summer, were several ponderous specimens of "Organic Remains," and some cabinets filled with shells, and hard, dry, glittering mineral productions: types of the cold, ungenial union of Mr. and Mrs. Velters.

Not much unlike a statue, save that he was dressed in black, stood Mr. Blinks, the butler, who received his master with a sort of silent awe as if, though accustomed to it for years, he had never recovered from the first overwhelming sensation of his presence. Freezing amidst his clerks, Mr. Velters was a perfect iceberg among his dependents; the footmen glided about like ghosts, the maid-servants, if seen, vanished like troubled spirits. Nature, we are told, abhors a vacuum, yet the idea of having discovered an exhausted receiver—as if you had at least got to a place that held nothing at all, or, at any rate, nothing that you cared about—impressed most people who set their feet for the first time inside the walls of Broadstone.

To expect a welcome on any one's threshold is an absurdity that has long since been got rid of. Nobody looks for it now; but if Brunton had dreamt of it an-

where, Broadstone was the last place where he would have found it.

"We dine at eight. Show Mr. Brunton his room," was the formula in which Mr. Velters expressed his hospitality, and there an end, until they met at the appointed hour.

Mr. Blinks, who, out of the servants'-hall, would have made an invaluable mute, performed a gesture with his extended palms, and silently conducted Brunton down a long stone corridor, preceded him up a lofty stone staircase, and, marshalling him the length of another long gallery, introduced him at last to an apartment in which the bed and furniture seemed to count for nothing, so vast were its dimensions; Mr. Blinks then silently withdrew, and Brunton was left to make the most of his solitary grandeur. He would infinitely have preferred a half-hour's promenade, to have familiarised himself with the locality, and perchance have encountered some of the inmates, but he saw at once that if he wished to keep in with Mr. Velters he must quietly submit to the discipline of his establishment. A glance from the windows satisfied him that there was no view—they overlooked a very classical court-yard, which divided the house from some very classical offices—so he sat down to ponder over his plans, in which occupation he remained perfectly undisturbed until the tolling of a bell, nearly as loud-voiced as Big Ben of Westminster, announced the half-hour before dinner. He might now legitimately occupy himself with his toilet. He did so with some care, for he had faith in first impressions, and once more he threaded the silent passages to the Hall of Science and Art, and was ushered thence by a mute in livery—the Velters' drab and purple—into a drawing-room, which seemed as empty as the chamber he had recently quitted, a fondness for unadorned space appearing to be the leading predilection of Mr. and Mrs. Velters.

A little time for preparation is not undesired by most

people when any great question is at hand, but you may occasionally have more than you want, and Brunton, whose impatience had taken him down stairs full twenty minutes too soon, was getting somewhat irritable under the influence of the solitary system, when a door opened, and two ladies entered the room.

Brunton recognised them at once as Miss Temple Travers and Miss Nalders, but as he was a perfect stranger he could only bow, while they, after the manner of their sex, slightly curtseyed as they passed, and then —like wild fowl settling on a lake—dropped on a distant sofa, almost invisible from the part of the room where he remained standing.

Another door, on the opposite side, admitted a diaphanous young lady, who sailed up to the sofa where the others were seated, and she also was lost in the gloom, so that, but for a very gentle murmur of voices, Brunton might still have fancied himself alone.

Presently a rustling of much silk and a wafting of fragrant odours indicated a fresh arrival, and a more positive tone of voice seemed to proclaim the presence of the mistress of the mansion. She, too, joined the group, and Brunton's purgatory was yet prolonged.

Finally the great bell tolled again, and while its clamour was at the highest, Mr. Velters appeared, with Mr. Travers leaning on his arm, and a son of his, of Puseyite aspect, walking behind.

With assiduous care Mr. Velters conducted his charge to an easy-chair, the distant group broke up and circled round the old gentleman, the positive tones became more distinct as they shaped themselves into an earnest inquiry respecting his health, and Mr. Velters, who was counting heads, looked round for the one that was wanting. Brunton moved from beneath the shadow of a window-curtain and advanced towards his host, who, for the first time since their acquaintance, conferred upon him the signal honour of shaking hands, though it must

be confessed that it was, on the part of Mr. Velters, a very flabby performance.

A formal introduction ensued, the new guest being presented to Mrs. Velters as "Mr. Brunton, late with us." The silk rustled in reply, and that was all. Brunton received, however, some compensation for this chilling reception in a friendly salutation from Mr. Travers, who looked up on hearing his name, and gave him his hand with a few words of greeting. The act had a twenty per cent. effect at least on Mrs. Velters, who straightway found her voice and said something that was intended to be civil, and might have been intelligible had she finished the sentence, but dinner was at that moment announced by Mr. Blinks, and the pairing-off took place. Mrs. Velters, reversing the order of precedence in her own favour—as some ladies are apt to do—led the way with Mr. Travers, her husband followed with Alice, the Puseyite son gave his arm to Miss Nalders, and the diaphanous young lady, who proved to be Miss Arabella Velters, fell to the lot of Richard Brunton.

It is not my intention to describe the dinner, which was as grand as possible, but not quite so brilliant as it might have been, always supposing that brilliancy does not consist in painted china, cut-glass, and burnished silver. Mrs. Velters was supremely scientific, Mr. Velters ineffably pompous, and when these qualities are prominently displayed by host and hostess, it does not require a conjuror to tell one that the guests must be slightly bored. So of the evening that succeeded, in which little progress was made towards the mutual acquaintance of those who were thus thrown together.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ADVENTURE.

MRS. VELTERS—if one may use so vulgar a phrase in speaking of so august a lady—"came it strong" on the following day.

We all know the limited resources of a country-house on Sunday in the way of amusement, and as Mr. Velters had a Lord-Robert-Grosvenor-ish qualm about horses, and sent his coachman and grooms to church in the afternoon, the guests at Broadstone were entirely at his wife's mercy. Nor did she spare them.

The sermon having been duly discussed at luncheon, and its quality settled by Mrs. Velters beyond appeal, the tug of war began.

"I am particularly anxious, Miss Temple Travers"—she always used both names—"that you should see a very remarkable specimen of the *Gloriosa superba*, which Whorl, my gardener, told me this morning had burst into flower during the night. It is a highly gratifying fact, for the *Gloriosa*, as you are aware, requires excessive attention to bring out the red and yellow in the flower to full perfection. Height, too, is a great desideratum with the plant in this country, and that, I am happy to say, I have obtained."

This last observation was true in another sense, for Mrs. Velters—an angular, bony, masculine woman—stood five feet seven at least, but she was wholly unconscious of her personal attractions, "Mind" being all she went in for.

Miss Travers was only too glad of an opportunity of seeing so rare a specimen. She was fond of botany, but kept within bounds.

"I think, sir," pursued Mrs. Velters, turning, with a smile, to Mr. Travers, whom she singled out as her next victim—"I think, sir, that I shall be able to show *you* something *almost* as fine as you have at Beechgrove. I assure you I pride myself very much upon the result of my attempt."

"Do you mean one of my Palms?" replied Mr. Travers, "for that, I am afraid, is the only thing about which we can enter into competition with our neighbours. Alice has a passion for Palms of all kinds; she has been led to it by her love of poetry—and the East. Is it not so, Alice?"

The self-command for which Miss Travers was remarkable seemed suddenly, at this moment, to have deserted her. She coloured deeply, and faltered as she replied, "that the grace and beauty of the tree, as well as its associations, gave it an especial charm."

Old people are pertinacious in their ideas, and Mr. Travers, influenced by some particular thought, did not dismiss the subject.

"I remember," he continued, "that you once made a translation of some verses from a German poet, on the subject of the Palm, which I thought very pretty. I should like Mrs. Velters to hear them."

"I shall be delighted beyond measure," exclaimed that lady, who was dying with impatience to remount her botanical hobby. "Pray be kind enough to repeat them, Miss Temple Travers."

"I fear I have forgotten my own version," returned Alice, who had now recovered her self-possession, and whose cheek had subsided to its habitual paleness. "But I will try to recollect it."

After a momentary pause she resumed:

"'The rock was bleak, and wild, and bare,
Where the sad Pine-tree stood alone,
Rooted in dreamy slumber there—
A shroud of ice around him thrown:

He dreamt a stately Palm arose
Far in a distant Eastern land;
And mourn'd like him amidst his snows,
Lone, in the desert's burning sand.'

The image is pretty which the poet wishes to convey, only in the original it is more closely and forcibly expressed. He calls it 'Wechsel-Sehnen,' which is something more than a mere desire for change."

"It is, if I may intrude the remark," said Richard Brunton, fixing his eyes on Alice, "the longing of similar natures for meeting—or, perhaps, union."

Miss Travers bowed, and turned her head away from the speaker.

"There is," he said to himself, "some mystery here. I must find it out."

Mrs. Velters, who did not often occupy herself so benevolently, here came to the rescue: to be sure she was impatient for another start.

"*Have* you got the original German, Miss Temple Travers? Your version is exquisitely rendered, but when I meet with anything beautiful I never rest till I have traced it to its primary cause."

The lines were promised, and Arabella, who was learning German, could copy them out for Mrs. Velters, that she might commit them to memory at leisure. At leisure, certainly, for it so happened that Mrs. Velters did not understand German; but she made up for that deficiency by what she *was* well crammed with, and on that tack she now shaped her course.

"To return, however, to what I was observing—though I am truly grateful for the charming episode—the Palm that I was alluding to is the *Caryota Urens*. I need not remind you, sir, that it is a native of most of the tropical parts of Asia, especially in mountainous situations, where, according to Roxburgh, it grows to one of the largest of the Palm tribe."

"Neither of our houses, I apprehend," said Mr.

Travers, smiling, "is quite large enough for its full development."

"Perhaps not," returned Mrs. Velters, "but we may approximate, and, at all events, we can study its characteristics as closely as we please. It has pinnated leaves and wedge-shaped leaflets, strongly toothed at the extremity; monœcious polyandrous flowers; a somewhat peltate stigma; and a one or two-seeded pulpy fruit with the embryo near the point of the albumen. I hope," she continued, "that I render my definition sufficiently clear You understand botanical terms?"

The last words were addressed to Brunton, who lamented his total ignorance of that branch of science. Mrs. Velters was quite radiant; here was somebody to teach.

"I shall take you under my charge, then," she said. "Miss Temple Travers—Mr. Travers—shall we adjourn to the hot-houses?"

They did so—but having to pass through the classical hall, an opportunity occurred which Mrs. Velters was not the woman to throw away. Indeed, it never entered into her thoughts to do so, for she invariably lectured there on Sunday afternoon. As everybody came in for their turn, she fastened now upon Miss Nalders.

"I always feel sorry" (she meant "glad") "when I hear that conchology—fossil conchology in particular—is neglected by any of my friends. I should so like you, my dear Miss Nalders, to give your attention to it, for a few hours a day only; that would be quite sufficient to enable you to master the rudiments."

"Thank you," replied Miss Nalders, in her very softest voice, which, when there was occasion, could convey a very hard meaning, "thank you! But I have so many pleasing duties—my dearest Alice claims my thoughts so entirely—that I fear I must, for the present, postpone the study you are kind enough to suggest."

"Oh, undoubtedly,—though with your mind, at certain moments, you would find it a positive boon. That

specimen? I am glad you have named it. It is what we call a Ricinula horrida; a variety of the family of Entomostomata. The Ricinula, my dear Miss Nalders, is an animal which very closely resembles both the Buccinum and the Purpura. You may observe, amongst other peculiarities, that the right lip is digitated externally and toothed within, while the left lip is callous and wrinkled. The operculum, as I need hardly point out, is horny, oval, transverse, and concentric."

As Mrs. Velters always spoke very fast, she now stopped for a moment to recover her breath. Richard Brunton longed to say that, besides the unhappy shell, something else was "horrida" and "callous," if not "wrinkled" into the bargain.

"My classification is not yet completed," Mrs. Velters went on, "or you would not, of course, meet with a fossil specimen in the same cabinet with one that is extant. The pair of Goniatites, which you see there, belong to an extinct group of fossil shells—the division of Cephalopodous Mollusca. Some writers look upon them as a section of Ammonites, but I entirely dissent from that opinion. The difference between the two is striking: the last chamber of Goniatites extends more than one turn beyond the concamerations, but in Ammonites only three-fourths of a turn."

Most of the party had taken more than three-fourths of a turn beneath the concameration of the classical hall while this exordium was in full swing, and, if they could have done so while their hostess was speaking, would have made their relation to her subject more complete. As it was, they might have been compelled to hear the conchological lecture out, if Brunton had not effected a diversion.

"May I ask if that is a fossil spider?" he inquired, pointing to a very long-armed Crustacean.

"A spider! One of the Arancidæ! Absurd! My dear sir, you ought to know better! That is a true Decapod: the Gonoplax Angulata. *You* would call it a

crab. It inhabits the Mediterranean and the ocean, and keeps among rocks at considerable depths, and seems to live solitary."

"Happy crab!" murmured Brunton.

"It swims with facility, and often rises to the surface of the water without ever coming out. It feeds on small fish and radiated animals. A spider! Only look at the carapace and the form of the external jaw-feet. I must teach you something of zoology as well as of botany. That reminds me of my *Gloriosa*. My dear Mr. Travers, I trust you will pardon me, but the pursuit of science is so absorbing——Permit me to show you the way. Arabella, keep near Miss Temple Travers, you will benefit by her observations; Mr. Brunton, I must detain you by *my* side."

Assuredly this was not what Brunton desired just then, but he yielded with as good a grace as he could muster, and, heading the procession, Mrs. Velters moved on.

It would not be fair upon those who chance to read these pages to inflict upon them another dose of science at the hand of Mrs. Velters. It was some relief to those who were obliged to listen that the objects described were too interesting in themselves to be rendered unattractive by the learned jargon which she so remorselessly and unremittingly poured forth, and at least an hour was consumed with a certain amount of satisfaction on the part of her audience. At the expiration of that time they had reached the Palm-house, and here, while Mr. Travers took a seat and Brunton stood in an attitude of respectful attention, Mrs. Velters expatiated on her favourite Caryota, and so engaged was she with her subject, that she did not perceive that they were her only companions.

Whether Miss Travers was unwilling to awaken thoughts that only slumbered—thoughts capable of stirring her bosom to its very depths—or whether she merely wished for fresh air after the highly-raised temperature of the hot-houses, is not a question that I need discuss; but that Miss Nalders and herself, Arabella

Velters—who had received the maternal injunction to keep close to Alice—and Mr. Albert Velters—who for reasons of his own desired to do the same—did slip out of the Palm-house by a side door, is a fact which I am under the necessity of recording. I may mention also that the four seceders took their way across the greensward, with the ostensible object of looking at some fine waterlilies which were clustered in a creek of the piece of water that spread before the house.

Mrs. Velters, in the mean time, went on with her dissertation. Mr. Travers knew all about the properties of the Caryota as well as she did, but Brunton had admitted his ignorance, and that was enough for her. She exhausted the botany of the plant, explained its nomenclature, and then proceeded to describe its uses, Mr. Travers gravely meditating and Brunton appearing to listen, though in reality he was trying to catch a glimpse of Alice Travers through the glass, having noticed her departure.

"The Caryota," she said, quoting Roxburgh's description as if it were the fruits of her own experience—"the Caryota is highly valuable to the natives of the countries where it grows in plenty; it yields them during the hot season an immense quantity of palm-wine, which Indian gentlemen, whom Mr. Velters has brought to Broadstone, inform me is commonly called toddy. The best trees are known to yield at the rate of a hundred pints in the twenty-four hours. The pith, or farinaceous part of the trunk of the old trees, is equal to the best sago; the natives make it into bread, and boil it into thick gruel. I have reason to believe this substance to be highly nutritious. I have eaten the gruel——"

At this point of her mendacious assertion, Mrs. Velters was suddenly cut short by a most terrific scream, which was followed up by a most tremendous shout.

Mr. Travers hastily rose, exclaiming, "My God! what has happened?"

The screaming and the shouting were repeated, louder

than before, and Brunton rushed from the Palm-house in the direction from whence the sounds proceeded.

On a small rustic bridge which crossed the creek two female figures were standing: one of them was leaning over the rail with her arms extended towards the water, but who she was her stooping attitude prevented Brunton from discerning; in the other, whose face was turned towards him, he recognised Arabella Velters. At the foot of the bridge Mr. Albert Velters stamped and roared, like one of the bulls of Basan mentioned in that morning's psalms, but he was doing nothing more effectual to help the fourth person of the party who struggled in the stream.

Brunton dashed forward at his utmost speed, tearing off his coat as he ran. He had need, he thought, of haste, if he wished to make that the best day's work of his whole life, for as he drew nearer he saw the struggling figure disappear, leaving on the surface a light blue cloak, such as Alice Travers wore.

He had no eyes for anything else—no ears for any voice save that which had reached him from the water; another desperate bound and he stood on the bank; the next moment he threw himself headlong in. A few rapid strokes brought him to the spot where the cloak was filling fast: he made an eager grasp, but it came away in his hand; he threw it from him, and dived for the sinking body. After a few seconds, which seemed an age to those who looked on, his right hand rose above the water, and he shot upwards, clasping with his left arm the object he had rescued. Brunton was a strong and experienced swimmer, and turning on his back while he held his burden fast across his breast, he struck out for the shore. In one short minute he had saved a life;—was it of all others the most precious? He knelt on the grass—he shook his head to clear the water from his eyes—he caught at the weeds which clung to the pale face before him—he started, with a violent exclamation, and, looking up, beheld the anxious

ure [illegible] Travers!

Who, then, had he saved?

Another glance, and his first impression was confirmed. It was Margaret Nalders.

Fond of dressing like her darling Alice, she also wore a light blue cloak.

Brunton was one who arrived rapidly at conclusions. If the rich heiress did not owe her life to his promptitude and courage, the friend did to whom of all others she was most attached. Margaret Nalders was the second-self of Alice Travers: through the gratitude on which he now had so strong a claim his object might no less surely be attained!

Suppressing, then, the first feeling of disappointment, he replied to Alice's eager inquiry that he felt sure Miss Nalders would recover, calling out in the same breath to Mr. Albert Velters to exercise his locomotive and bellowing faculties by running for the nearest medical assistance, and sending Arabella Velters to fetch brandy and eau-de-Cologne. Before he had well given his orders, Mr. Travers and the interrupted lecturer were on the spot, together with a posse of servants headed by Mr. Velters, who, in the confusion of the moment, still held in his hand "The History of Banking," to the perusal of which—for the five hundredth time—he had been piously devoting that Sunday afternoon. The coachman and grooms returning across the park from church hurried up at the same time, and with their assistance Miss Nalders was carried into the house. By one of those dispensations which seem always to occur when medical men are in question, Mr. Albert Velters met Mr. Probang, the Broadstone doctor, not a couple of hundred yards from the classical mansion: in fact, he was on his way to call there, rather hoping he might be asked to stay to dinner. He realised his expectation, or I should say took care to realise it, after his judicious treatment had brought Miss Nalders round, by announcing that the nature of the case required his constant presence during the next few hours. The party, however

was a male one—(perhaps Mr. Probang did not like his claret less on that account)—for all the ladies passed the evening in the invalid's room, after the unvarying feminine practice when events of this kind come off: Alice, because nothing could keep her from Margaret's side in sickness or in health—Arabella, from sister sympathy—and Mrs. Velters, on account of the strong desire she felt to deliver a lecture on asphyxia caused by immersion: she would have delivered it, too, if Mr. Probang, who was master of the situation, had not enjoined the most absolute quiet; so she contented herself with whispering emphatic fragments to her daughter, which she ordered her to take the first opportunity of committing to writing.

And how did Richard Brunton pass the evening?

Gladdened very much by the kind commendations of Mr. Travers; flattered by the approving words of Mr. Velters; and deeply rejoicing over the contents of a note which Alice Travers had thought it her duty to send to him from the bedside of her friend.

CHAPTER XV.

CONSULTATIONS.

When Mrs. Cutts informed Lord Harry FitzLupus that she was in the habit of giving *soirées à la Française*, she announced as a *fait accompli* what was only in perspective. Mrs. Cutts had never given anything of the kind, but as she meant to do so at the very first opportunity, she already gave herself credit for her good intentions, following in this respect the example of a great many who promise much and perform nothing. Mrs.

Cutts, however, was better than these, for having herself to gratify, she found it easier to keep her word than she might have done had she been merely labouring for the gratification of others.

Her chief difficulty lay in getting people enough to fill her rooms, for although Mr. Cutts had a tolerably large acquaintance, his friends were not exactly of that class that sheds lustre on society. She was, therefore, obliged to fall back on her own resources, which, as their present flourishing condition had not been of long duration, were necessarily somewhat limited.

After discussing the subject with her husband, and making him clearly perceive how advantageous the move she meditated was likely to prove, Mrs. Cutts resolved that her first party should be extremely select: it would be a greater compliment to Lord Harry FitzLupus, and moreover—there was no help for it. Mr. Ashley and his three daughters must, of course, be invited—the girls were showy, and could "do things" to make the evening agreeable—to say nothing of the position in which they themselves stood towards "Mr. A.," who—as Mr. Cutts remarked—was "the one that kept the game alive." Then there were Mrs. Basset and Claribel; but she at once rejected the little watchmaker—he was "such a nobody," besides, "he kept a shop"—so the descendant of the Black Prince's companion in arms was declared inadmissible to the *soirée* of the auctioneer's wife! Mrs. Cutts had no doubt that, at the instance of her sister, Dr. Brocas would "waive ceremony," and come without having previously been called upon. Ah, if she had known the delight which Dr. Brocas felt in mixing with vulgar people, when the vulgar fit was on him, she would not have hesitated for a moment! Lord Harry FitzLupus and Mr. Coates Taylor with themselves made eleven, and Richard Brunton, who must on no account be omitted, would complete the round dozen.

The number settled, and the young nobleman secured in the outset by a written promise, Mrs. Cutts sent out

her invitations, and to increase their value in the eyes of her guests, she added—"to meet Lord Harry Fitz-Lupus." The pleasure of writing this distinguished name went for something in committing this solecism: it was rather a triumph, also, over her dear friends, the Miss Ashleys.

"She takes us for fools, perhaps," said Matilda Ashley to her sisters, when she read the note addressed to herself, as they all sat at breakfast. "As if we didn't know that she wants to make a show-off of that niece of hers—the Covent Garden actress! Who's Lord Harry Fitz-Lupus, papa?—do you know anything about him?"

Mr. Ashley looked up from his newspaper and smiled—as a wolf smiles.

"I should think I did," he said.

"Ah, I see!" returned Matilda. "Will Mr. Brunton be there?"

"Most likely," replied Mr. Ashley.

Brunton also made his comments upon the invitation. Cool as he was by nature, and deeply as he calculated, a little agitation affected his mind when he thought over the possibilities that might arise from the adventure in which he had figured so conspicuously at Broadstone, and a certain degree of restlessness marked his general behaviour for some days afterwards. He did not settle to business so well as before; he felt *désœuvré*, and wished for something to turn the current of his reveries and put an end to unprofitable castle-building, that habit of moral dram-drinking which, after every indulgence, "asks for more."

This *soirée* of Mrs. Cutts was quite unlooked-for by him. As that lady and her husband had both observed, some time had gone by since last he saw them. This abstinence had its origin in prudence more than inclination, any intimacy with a person so well known as the money-lending auctioneer being certain to damage him in the opinion of his employers, if it were known by them. But now that he was no longer a dependent

upon the will of others, the same precaution was unnecessary. There was no reason why he should keep so entirely aloof from his *quondam* friend, and he felt glad of the opportunity of meeting which was thus afforded him. He was curious, too, to see what kind of a set Mrs. Cutts had got into. He knew her disposition for intrigue, and felt sure she did not play her cards without some fixed design. He, therefore, made up his mind to go, and replied to that effect.

Dr. Brocas was the last of the invited about whose acceptance there was any question.

"Oh, but this," he exclaimed, when he opened Mrs. Cutt's *billet*, "this is too delicious! *Cette femme est impayable*, with her fine-lady airs and her waiting-maid's manners. 'To meet Lord Harry FitzLupus.' What an inconceivable honour! Yes, Mrs. Cutts, if it were the Lord Harry himself, I would not refuse. There is so little fun in this world one can't afford to throw away a chance, and, as poor Figaro says: 'Je me presse de rire de tout, de peur d'être obligé d'en pleurer.' God knows I have had cause enough for crying, if that were all! But who do I see coming along the garden-walk? Mrs. Basset and my darling Claribel. Ah, that little girl is the last and best ray of sunshine on my life's long day! Now then, moppet," he continued, as Claribel entered the room with her aunt, "what's in the wind to-day, that has brought you here so early?"

"A petition to a very good-natured person," answered Claribel, smiling.

"If it be yours, or good Mrs. Basset's," said the gallant doctor, "he must be a churl, indeed, who says you nay."

"Well then, sir, it is to ask you, if you did not mind its coming from us, to go to a little party at my aunt's in May-fair, where I am to read a new part on Tuesday evening. She has, I believe, a few friends."

"Demure little pleader! You pretend not to know, then, that your aunt, Mrs. Cutts—what a frank, honest,

genial name it is—don't you think so, Mrs. Basset?—has already invited me herself! See, there is the form and style in which she does it—quite regal!"

"I assure you, sir," said Mrs. Basset, "we were neither of us aware that my sister had written. She was afraid, as you had only seen her once or twice, at our house at Brompton, that you might think she intruded——"

"Only seen her once or twice! *C'est une raison de plus*, my dear madam, for desiring to see her oftener. Oh, Mrs. Cutts, Mrs. Cutts, bellissima Cuttina!" Here he began singing:

"Je suis Lindor, ma naissance est commune;
Mes vœux sont ceux d'un simple bachelier:
Que n'ai-je, hélas! d'un brillant chevalier,
A vous offrir le rang et la fortune!
Le rang, le rang,
Le rang et la fortune!

Ha! ha! ha! ha! certainly, Mrs. Basset—certainly, my dear Claribel, I will throw myself at the feet of Mrs. Cutts, as gracefully as my gouty shoe will let me."

"Ah!" said Claribel in an under tone, "vous vous moquez de ma pauvre tante, et de moi aussi. Vous êtes bien méchant aujourd'hui."

"Au contraire, mon enfant, je suis on ne peut pas plus aimable. Pardon me, Mrs. Basset, I have the highest regard and esteem for your sister, and when I feel happy, when I can get the slightest glimpse of blue sky through the cloudy canopy of existence, then, my dear Mrs. Basset, I always sing."

Here Dr. Brocas poured out a glass of water from a large caraffe which always stood on the table beside him. From early habit, with, perhaps, a wholesome dread of gout—a thing of later growth—he could be abstemious as any Frenchman, and quite as gay, whether with wine or without it, though if he had been overheard, not seen, he would have passed for a veritable toper.

Raising the glass to his lips, and waving his extended arm, he began:

"Le vin et la paresse
Se partagent mon cœur:
Si l'une a ma tendresse . . . .
L'autre fait mon bonheur!"

Then, bowing to each of the ladies, he went on:

"C'est à toi, ma chère maîtresse,
C'est à toi, ma chère amie!"

Here he altered the measure, and assumed completely the air of a *bon vivant:*

"Quand on a bien servi l'amour,
Il faut boire, il faut boire, il faut boire!
Quand on a bien servi l'amour,
Il faut boire la nuit jusqu'au jour!
Il faut boire, il faut boire,
Il faut boire!"

"My dear doctor!" exclaimed Mrs. Basset, "how can you go on singing in that way in the middle of the day!"

"And does that make the matter worse! Would you have me sit up in my bed in the middle of the night, like a monk at midnight mass?"

In a deep bass voice, as if a Litany suddenly rose to his memory, and not the words of Pulci, he chanted:

"O Padre giusto, incomprensibil Dio,
Illumine il mio cor perfet-ta-mente!

Ah, one of these days I shall certainly bury myself in a cloister. We will go, Claribel, to Dauphiné: we will wander along the banks of the Isère; I with my palmer's hat and staff, you with no array save innocence and beauty! We will live upon the alms of the charitable, a sweet existence, precluding all thought of sordid toil,

and making us familiar with only the bright side of human nature——"

"But are you quite sure that side will be always exposed to us?" interrupted Claribel, laughing at his rhapsody.

"And if not, Claribel,—if the same worldliness that we have learnt to despise in this degraded temple of Mammon pursue us to the valley of the Grésivaudan,—if tender charity be not found in the haunts of the lowly, then, Claribel, we will dedicate ourselves to the service of Heaven. The Grande Chartreuse shall be my refuge; there, clad in the brown woollen garment of a simple servitor, with crucifix and skull inviting me to constant prayer and the contemplation of death, I shall gradually wean myself from all earthly care——"

"And what is to become of me?" asked Claribel; "you remember you once told me, in describing the Grande Chartreuse, that ladies are never allowed to enter there."

"You are quite right, child. That being the case, we will shun the convent's gloom; we will return to the outer world, and, after dropping gently down the Rhône, we will cross the blue Mediterranean and spend the remainder of our lives in sunny Italy."

"Dear me, Doctor!" exclaimed Mrs. Basset, to whom this phase of romance was a thorough mystification, "I hope you won't go till you have helped us out of our trouble!"

"Trouble, my Bassetini, are you in trouble? What about?"

Besides the errand on which her sister had sent her, Mrs. Basset had a small affair of her own, respecting which she was desirous of asking Dr. Brocas's advice and assistance. Claribel had succeeded as a *débutante*, but for the present, and for some time to come, fame was all that was likely to accrue from her success. Mr. Wimple, the manager, bestowed upon her a great deal of well-deserved praise, but he seasoned his approbation with

quite enough criticism to justify the course he adopted of not offering any salary.

"The great thing, my dear madam," he said to Mrs. Basset, when she raised that question—"the great thing for your charming niece—and I acknowledge that she *is* charming, and likely, very likely, to make a great hit by-and-by—is to keep her well before the public. *That* is the real advantage. Now if I were to give her a salary at once—of course her talent must not be paid *médiocrement*,—not *médiocrement*, madam, you yourself would not wish that,—if I were to give her a large salary, look at the jealousies and heart-burnings that would immediately break out in my establishment. This person would throw up her parts,—that person would refuse to play unless *her* salary were doubled,—I should be ruined in a week, madam,—left perfectly high and dry—without another actress of any kind or description. Now I put it to you, madam,—just ask yourself,—stand for a moment in my position,—and simply ask yourself if that would be fair to me or to my company? I should be paralyzed, and Miss Page would be nowhere: her prospects, madam, would be utterly blasted! Whereas, by a little judicious forbearance, feeling the public pulse, as I may say, ministering to no rival jealousies, we gradually creep on and on, fix ourselves in public estimation, defy competition, and draw on the treasury for any amount weekly. That's the view, madam, which I take of Miss Page's position, as a father, if I may be allowed to say so, as a manager, and a man!"

Which of these three characters predominated in this harangue, Mrs. Basset was not shrewd enough to discern; even if she had a glimmering of the truth it was of little use, with her inexperience, to contend against Mr. Wimple's sharp practice. It only remained, therefore, to submit and go on hoping—hoping—as we all do in this long and weary fight. There was a gleam of hope in Mrs. Meggot's legacy, for, though it only amounted to a few hundred pounds, that sum, if carefully husbanded

—though a difficulty lay in that direction—would serve to keep the wolf from the door until Claribel was in a condition to claim as her right the salary which Mr. Wimple withheld.

But "between the cup and the lip,"—we know the proverb. The little watchmaker having taken upon himself all the expenses of his aunt's funeral, went to Doctors' Commons to prove her will, when, to his amazing astonishment, he was informed that two *caveats* had already been entered prohibiting administration: one of them on the part of Mrs. Hornybeak, the intimate friend of the deceased; the other on that of Mr. Bagall, the Treasurer of St. Trephine's Hospital.

So that instead of a legacy the little watchmaker inherited a lawsuit.

This was the *exposé* which Mrs. Basset had to make.

On hearing it, the gaiety of Dr. Brocas gave place to the gravity which became his age and profession. He was in an instant the learned civilian again, and, what was better, the man of real feeling. He promised Mrs. Basset that he would give the matter his closest attention, dismissed Claribel and her aunt with the kindest words, and shut himself up for the day to meditate on the especial wickedness that extends an injury beyond the grave.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. CUTTS GIVES HER PARTY.

FEW people do anything for the first time—if they have meditated on the subject—without a certain degree of nervousness.

Mrs. Cutts was not at all of a nervous temperament, but she could not help feeling anxious about the success

of her *soirée*. If she did not absolutely say "Il y va de ma gloire!" it was because she felt that something more satisfactory than glory depended on the result.

She was, of course, no less accessible to the vanity of success than I who write or you who read, but—however agreeable it might have been to her—the gratification of personal vanity did not, at this moment, occupy the first place in her thoughts.

To judge, indeed, by the confidence she bestowed on her sister (and with whom—provided they are not rivals—can a woman be sincere, if not with her own sister?), Mrs. Cutts appeared the personification of disinterestedness.

"I need not point out to you, Harriet," she said to Mrs. Basset, when the party was determined on, "what an immense advantage it will be to Claribel to be properly introduced. My circle consists of none but first-rate people; all, as the French say, 'sans peur et sans reproche,' that is to say, accustomed to high society—moving in it, in fact. It makes all the difference where a girl is met with in private life who gets her bread in a public capacity. But she must be very nicely dressed. Now I dare say you haven't much money, Harriet, so make the most of this bank-note; get all you want, both of you, and come early."

Mrs. Basset was strictly obedient to these instructions. The note was speedily converted into silks and gauzes, and Claribel and her aunt presented themselves in Mayfair all the sooner for being conveyed thither by Dr. Brocas in the very handsome carriage which he had just purchased—though the word "purchased" must be taken with reservation, as it was not yet, and very likely never would be, paid for. It is probable, however, that this consideration did not diminish the learned civilian's sense of enjoyment. He was all admiration at Claribel's appearance, and she deserved his praise.

Let me describe her:

Fair, very fair, with features far from regular, yet such as no criticism could amend, for it was to expression th

owed their chief attraction. The hue that flushed her cheek, the light that danced in her eyes, the smile that played on her lips, came and went as quickly as summer lightning flashes across the clear evening sky. In repose she seemed almost sad; in animation more than happy; but under each aspect, lovely. The undefinable charm is that which fixes most, and this charm was Claribel's. Even if you had not seen her the effect would have been the same, for, as the blind derive from sound their notions of form and colour, her voice conveyed a perfect idea of what she really was—tender at one moment, joyous at another, always soft and sweet. It was said by Mrs. Basset that she more resembled her father than her mother, but on either side there was the inheritance of beauty. The newspaper critics differed, as newspaper critics will, about her height and the colour of her eyes. These were debatable points: but they all agreed that no one on the stage had such beautiful hair; and one writer—evidently very young and very much given to metaphor—compared its hue to that of the golden grape on which the sun had shed his last lingering ray!

Perhaps Mrs. Cutts would have been better pleased if her sister and niece had arrived without the escort of Dr. Brocas, but the handsome carriage at her door reconciled her to his appearance at an earlier hour than she had expected, and she received him with as much *empressement* as if he had been a royal personage. Dr. Brocas had been debating in his own mind whether he should be intolerably low or particularly refined: his love of mischief inclined him to mortify his hostess by an exhibition of astounding vulgarity; but when he cast his eyes on Claribel, and reflected that the mortification would be equally hers, his better nature prevailed, and he resolved on playing the part of the accomplished courtier. To do so without *persiflage* was next to impossible, having such a subject as Mrs. Cutts to deal with; but he promised himself to veil as closely as possible the irony of his praise.

"Except for the river, my dear madam," he said, as

he placed himself beside an open window, partially screened from the street by the mignonette boxes in the balcony—"except for the river—and that is only supportable at high water—the banks of the Thames, on which my poor cottage stands, have nothing to boast of over a part of the town like this. Here the western breeze blows as pure and soft, the tints in the sky through that opening leading to the park are as rosy and bright, those lofty trees cast as tender a shade, and the perfume of your flowers is quite as sweet. These are things, my dear madam, which you can take as much pleasure in as myself, while you have the advantage of that society from which I am habitually banished. And then," he continued, looking round the room, "you have so much taste!"

Mrs. Cutts, however shrewd and worldly, was open to flattery; she prided herself on her house, and what was in and about it.

"Oh, you are very good, I'm sure, to say so," she replied; "but when Cutts resolved upon his present line of business, I said to him, 'Mayfair or nothing:' and as to the house, why, when you *are* fitting up, the best way is to do it well. Spare no expense, that's my maxim."

"And an admirable one it is," returned Dr. Brocas, who on that point perfectly agreed with her. "I have not the honour," pursued he, "of being known to Mr. Cutts—it is one, however, which I shortly hope to realise—but"—pointing to a portrait which hung near him in a very gorgeous frame, a thing absolutely necessary for keeping down the bright stock and flaming waistcoat which glowed within it—"but those I should say are the features of your excellent husband."

"Quite so," replied Mrs. Cutts; "the likeness is considered very good, and it cost a precious——that's to say, a good deal."

"I could have sworn it," said Dr. Brocas, without particularising the fact he was about to assert; "there is something in that countenance which reminds me of my

late revered master, the king—though more, now I look closer, of the Comte d'Artois when he was of the same age. Now that head," he went on, addressing himself to the *pendant* of the master of the house—the portrait of Mrs. Cutts herself—"that head has haunted me like a vision for more than thirty years! I know that it is meant for you, in fact no one can doubt it, but I feel—you will excuse an old man's reminiscences—I feel that it bears even a greater resemblance to the beautiful Princess Bobolini, who was drowned in the Arno in the autumn of——never mind when. Ah, my dear madam, Aurelia and yourself might have been sisters, if her death had not happened so long ago."

"I have often been told," said Mrs. Cutts, "that I look like a foreigner. Indeed, when we lived abroad, I was always taken for one. Our intimate friend, the poor Markey de Claque, never would believe that I was English. I can't repeat half the things he used to say—dear old man, he's dead and gone now—the French, you know, are so very polite—but nothing could persuade him to the contrary."

"Monsieur de Claque," observed Dr. Brocas, "was a person of judgment. With his aristocratic name and his associations he naturally supposed that a court was your proper sphere."

"I wish you had known the Markey," said Mrs. Cutts; adding, with dignity, "he was quite the gentleman!"

"I feel assured of it," replied Dr. Brocas. "I grieve not to have made his acquaintance. His portion, no doubt, is with the just!"

"Oh, here's Cutts at last!" exclaimed the lady, as the auctioneer entered the room pulling on a very tight pair of lemon-coloured gloves,—"why, where have you been?"

"He, too," murmured Dr. Brocas, as he scanned the countenance of his questionable host—"he, too, was made for a court—the Fives' Court, I imagine!"

Mr. Cutts was presented to Dr. Brocas; and his language and manner, as they could not fail to do, confirmed the impression which his physiognomy had created. A mixture of *mauvaise honte* and swagger clearly revealed the sort of man who had just been likened to George the Fourth and the Comte d'Artois.

"Proud and happy," mumbled Mr. Cutts, "to see you in Mayfair, sir."

Dr. Brocas bowed gracefully, and held out his hand.

The auctioneer was encouraged.

"Noble equipage that of yours, sir, bran new; caught a glimpse of it over the muslin of my dressing-room window. One of Blackshaw's, I should say, by the build. Two hundred and fifty, at least."

"You have a critical eye, Mr. Cutts. You have named the maker and the price."

"Ah! I knew I couldn't be far out. 'Tisn't easy to deceive me. My profession, you know, sir, see the value of things at a glance."

"An estimable quality. As a traveller—for Mrs. Cutts tells me you have lived a great deal abroad—you must have felt the full force of the remark: 'Nos talents sont nos plus sûrs et nos meilleurs protecteurs.'"

Mr. Cutts looked a little confused, not quite understanding what he heard, nor being at all aware of its application. He went back into the mumbling line again, and repeated the words "proud" and "happy."

Fortunately a loud rolling knock at the street door caused a diversion.

"Mr. A.!" exclaimed Mrs. Cutts, peering over the balcony. "Run down, Tom, and offer your arm to the ladies."

This was not altogether a very dignified course to suggest to the master of the house, but Mrs. Cutts must be pardoned: it was her first party in London. Perhaps they managed matters differently in France—at least in her "circle." But whether it was right or wrong, Mr. Cutts obeyed and disappeared. When next he presented

himself, in the wake of Mr. Ashley and his eldest daughter, Matilda—who, having heavenly attributes of voice, was attired in sky-blue satin—he bore on one arm Miss Caroline Ashley, arrayed in apricot, and, on the other, Miss Julia, who had chosen pomegranate—let me suppose on account of their complexions. All three young ladies looked very handsome, after the comeliness of their race, and did not seem unconscious of the fact. They sailed up to Mrs. Cutts, whom they saluted with friendly volubility, bent slightly to Mrs. Basset with all the condescension of wealth, and swept past poor Claribel without bestowing a glance upon her, as if it was a great deal too much to expect that they should notice a person who was merely invited to entertain the company. Mr. Ashley, who had an eye for everybody and saw business in everything, was struck by the "*grand air*" of Dr. Brocas, and asked Mrs. Cutts, under his breath, to tell him who he was. She replied, in the same manner: "A person of great distinction—intimate with George the Fourth—immensely rich—very fond of my niece—brought her in his own carriage—very likely leave her a fortune."

"An acquaintance worth cultivating," thought the Hebrew dealer. "My girls must speak to that young woman."

He joined the resplendent maidens and quietly expressed his wishes. They frowned and bit their lips, but, as papa's wishes were very like orders, did not venture to oppose them further. Mr. Ashley then returned to Mrs. Cutts, and was introduced by her to Dr. Brocas.

At this moment Richard Brunton arrived, and the clouds which had begun to lower upon the brows of the daughters of Israel immediately cleared off. An available man was amongst them—how much more available since first they saw him! It is true he was a man then, but now he was in a fair way of being a very rich one. If they could have read the thought which for the last few days had been uppermost in his mind—if they could

have guessed the means by which he sought to become wealthy—these amiable young ladies would, perhaps, have been more chary of their sunny smiles and radiant glances; but being innocent as doves—at least in the matter of foreknowledge—they greeted Richard Brunton as warmly as any bachelor could desire, and he was by no means backward in returning their greeting.

"As there is nothing else to do here," he said to himself, "I may just as well flirt with these girls."

And he did so to their hearts' content.

Nothing else to do! How long did Richard Brunton continue in that way of thinking?

A slight colloquy now took place between Mr. and Mrs. Cutts. He advised "the tea," but the lady would not hear of it before the arrival of the guest of the evening. The point was being discussed when the page threw open the drawing-room door and announced "Lord 'Arry FitzLoopus and Mr. Coates Taylor."

Lord Harry, with his glass fixed in his eye, looked round the room with the air of one who wonders how he ever got there. He was, however, allowed but little time for reflection, as Mrs. Cutts, who had been on the watch for the last half-hour, pounced upon him the moment he entered.

"Delighted to think your lordship has not forgotten me!" said she, with effusion.

"Uttarly impaw-sable to forget, my de-ar Mrs. Cutts; even Glosetongue could not make me do so! I left him in a talking trance, proving to no-bady's satisfaction but his own that he was the only virtuous polatician in the kingdam!"

"Your lordship has just left the House, then? How very kind! Allow me to make your lordship and Mr. Coates Taylor known to my friends—none but intimates, my lord."

And she ran through the gamut of wealth's respectability there represented.

"But your charming niece," interrupted Lord Harry.

"I don't see her! Oh, there she is? Pray present me."

"Claribel!" exclaimed Mrs. Cutts at the top of her voice, anxious to proclaim the gratifying fact to all the company—"Claribel, come here! Lord Harry Fitz-Lupus is so kind as to say he wishes to speak to you."

"I am quite shocked!" said Lord Harry, crossing the room hastily; "pray don't rise."

But Claribel had been obedient to her aunt's summons, and met the young nobleman half way, who saluted her with great respect. The movement was not lost upon the three Miss Ashleys, who now came fluttering up, and Brunton, whom the words of Mrs. Cutts had attracted, also joined the group which formed round the young actress. Lord Harry, who really deserved the encomium passed by Mrs. Cutts upon the Marquis de Claque, began to converse very agreeably, and considerably relieved Claribel from the embarrassment of suddenly finding herself the centre of observation—a greater trial amongst friends, like the Miss Ashleys, than it would have been beneath the eyes of the public. Those ladies were, however, very complimentary in their observations, and could not forgive themselves—they said—for not having discovered that Claribel was in the room. Mr. Ashley, satisfied with his daughters' proceedings, drew a chair near that of Dr. Brocas, and got upon the topic of Art, in which he soon found he had to do with a *connoisseur*.

As an indispensable preliminary to the evening's entertainment, Mrs. Cutts rang the bell for tea. It was brought round by a severe-looking man in black, with white cotton gloves, who was supported by the page carrying a large plated salver, whereon was a huge pile of muffins. In obedience to their instructions the attendants presented themselves first before Lord Harry. He never drank tea, but that was no reason, the page thought, why he should decline what in the page's private opinion made tea really valuable; besides, he had received posi-

tive orders, and, touching Lord Harry on the elbow, he advanced his salver, and firmly said:

"Muffins, my lord!"

Lord Harry looked at the boy for a few moments in speechless surprise. All his affectation returned, he raised his glass to his eye, surveyed the page and the salver with attention, and then, in the tone of a man who thinks, but is not quite sure he has made a discovery, reiterated:

"Muffins! Oh! ah! The things you hear of in the street, with—ah—a man—and a basket—and—a bell? Are they good to eat?"

"Yes, my lord. Very, my lord," replied the page, with unction.

"Thank you," drawled his lordship; "the next—a—time I'm hungry I'll think of them. That will do. You may go, little boy. No muffins!" And he resumed his conversation with Claribel as gravely as if no such episode had intervened.

The play which Claribel had selected was "As You Like It." Mr. Wimple had advised her to study the part of *Rosalind*, and she was anxious to make trial of her strength before she appeared publicly in it. The character was well adapted to the development of her abilities; its tenderness, its purity, its grace, its gaiety, were thoroughly identified with her nature; that happiest combination of wit and poetry seemed to have been expressly created for the efforts of one so young, so fair, so imaginative as Claribel, and her reading gave great satisfaction. The most vehement in praise was Lord Harry FitzLupus, the most critical, Dr. Brocas; Mr. Coates Taylor made some shrewd observations, and Mr. Ashley commended judiciously.

Richard Brunton alone remained silent. Was he too much engrossed by thoughts alien to the scene before him, or under a new and unaccountable influence? He, ordinarily fluent enough, felt now at a loss for the commonest words in which to express himself. Common words, however, were not those he wanted, and suitable

ones he could not find. Like *Orlando*, of whom he had just heard, he asked himself:

What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue?

Three hours ago, and he did not believe it was in the power of woman to sway him in the slightest matter. Yet the seduction of a sweet voice, the charm of a bright glance, had in one moment overturned all his resolves. When he determined to become rich, he also formed the determination of making everything subservient to his purpose. The object he sought to attain required the concentration of all his faculties: he knew himself possessed of a strong will, and never having known what love was, he laughed at the idea of becoming its slave. But the spell from which none escape had at last been thrown over him, as in an instant the cloud envelops an Alpine traveller, bewildering his footsteps and turning him from his upward path.

Richard Brunton, then, was silent, but his was the silence of observation. With the quickness of jealousy,

Which hath but one eye, and that always ope,

he saw the admiration of Lord Harry FitzLupus for Claribel. He remembered also that the young nobleman's name had been mentioned in conjunction with that of Alice Travers. To meet twice on such different tracks was strange! As regarded Miss Travers, however, he did not fear his rivalry, for it was patent to all the world that Lord Harry was a spendthrift, and he had heard enough of the character of Mr. Temple Travers to dissipate any apprehension of his giving his daughter to a man of broken fortunes. But in the pursuit of a girl in the position of Claribel, the case might be very different. Lord Harry FitzLupus was certainly good-looking, his habits were those of the best society, he was a man of fashion, and Brunton perceived—for he watched him closely—that certain absurdities of language and

manner could be laid aside by his lordship, when he thought it necessary.

Then Brunton asked the question—What was his own motive in desiring to prevent Lord Harry's success with Claribel? In the first place, because he loved her himself. In the next—but there he stopped! He could not answer for Lord Harry's intentions, but was he able to explain his own?

Had he decided upon relinquishing the dreams of his ambition?

Assuredly not—and if not, what right had he to think of Claribel?

Think of her, however, he did throughout the whole of that evening, greatly to the displeasure of the sky-blue, the apricot, and the pomegranate-robed beauties, who—to use their own words—could not understand "what had made him so glum all of a sudden."

But if Brunton was moody and taciturn, he formed an exception to the rest of the company. Dr. Brocas, delighted with the *éclat* of his *protégée*, was more than usually gay, and Mr. Ashley, whom he had already fascinated by his skill in *virtù*, and the careless manner in which he talked of giving large sums for works of art, pronounced him "a wonderful old gentleman." On his part, Dr. Brocas seemed very well content with his new acquaintance, and promised the Hebrew Dealer that he would at no very distant day pay him a visit in Finsbury-square, and "look at" his collection—a phrase which Mr. Ashley at once translated into a handsome cash transaction.

Mrs. Cutts was in the seventh heaven of rapture at the success of her scheme, perceiving as quickly as Brunton that her niece had completely captivated Lord Harry FitzLupus. Indeed, it was evident to Claribel herself—though inexperienced to distinguish between the flatteries of the *coulisses* and a more serious meaning—that he showed her marked attention: nor was she altogether displeased by it, for without exactly knowing why or

wherefore, she had felt a kind of liking for him at once. Another in Lord Harry's situation might have been better satisfied had Claribel been less disembarrassed, but the gallant young nobleman did not see very deeply beneath the surface, and was quite willing to accept his good fortune without too closely inquiring into the cause of it, a faint glimmering of his own merits being, perhaps, not entirely shut out from his consideration.

In this manner all who are of chief account in this story were well pleased with the result of the party, save only Richard Brunton, who, pleading an early business engagement next day, was the first to take leave. His way home led him through Belgravia, and, a prey to deeply conflicting thoughts, he paused before one of the finest houses there. In that house, at that moment, was Alice Travers. Should he forego the hope of one day winning that prize? He gazed long and steadfastly at the room where he supposed she was then sleeping. For an instant a light appeared at one of the windows. It seemed to answer his question.

"Never while I breathe!" he said.

He turned away, and added, with a sigh:

"'But heavenly Rosalind!'"

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CHAPTER XVII.

A TREATY OF ALLIANCE.

MORNING, after a night almost wholly sleepless, renewed in Brunton the thought which Claribel had inspired.

With respect to her—as, indeed, to his other projects—his course was beset by difficulties. He had already embarked on two great ventures, yet, arduous as they

were, their aim was alike, and both might be pursued together.

But Fortune and Claribel were opposed.

In marrying her he must relinquish the dearly cherished hope of becoming the richest man in England, a hope with which nothing else—up to the present moment—could enter into competition. Accident, also, had come in aid of the purpose which, for the last two years, he had steadily kept in view. Should he throw away a chance on which it was impossible to have reckoned, one that, skilfully turned to account, might lead him direct to the haven of his desire? He knew that Margaret Nalders exercised a powerful control over the will of Alice Travers; such an influence might even sway the affections of the heiress, who had, herself, expressed her gratitude for what she called "an inestimable service." The way in that direction was clear, if he had the hardihood to follow it.

That was the pictured side of the tapestry: let him look at the reverse.

Suppose Miss Travers not to be won! Suppose the pride of her father insurmountable! His fortune must then be made by other means than an interested marriage. He had framed a plan in his own mind—had even been advised upon it—but its execution was hazardous, and if it failed, the enterprise involved him in certain ruin.

If, however, it succeeded, he might follow the bent of his inclinations, and marry the woman who had so suddenly filled his heart with an inextinguishable passion.

Marry her!—an actress! Why marry?

He returned to the question which arose when first the debate between love and interest was bred within him.

Surely, with all the precedents which the effort of a moment could bring to memory, the attempt to obtain her on easier terms was not so hopeless!

If Claribel's nature were such as to yield to the temptations he offered, there would be no necessity to depend alone on the dangerous scheme which, as a last resort, he meditated. He might still entertain the hope of gaining the hand of Miss Travers, still labour on safer ground for the wealth he coveted. London was a wide place, assumed names were taken every day, the merchant in the City might be whom he pleased in the suburb, secrecy could always be bought, and the world would remain—as it constantly does—ignorantly blind to all but that which actually passes beneath its eyes.

There was in this programme much of that reckoning which sells the skin of the bear before the beast is captured, and Brunton was well aware of it; but every hour of his life had been a speculation, and though at the outset he had met with many checks, the turning-point, he persuaded himself, was past on the day he was admitted into the house of Temple Travers. Everything since that time had gone on prosperously, and why, unless he doubted himself, should he doubt the future?

Nevertheless, there were many circumstances that required careful consideration.

The rapid review he had taken of the characters of those by whom Claribel was surrounded had brought him to certain conclusions.

He perceived that Mrs. Cutts, having an object of her own to answer, was throwing her niece in the way of Lord Harry FitzLupus; unless, therefore, he could offer a higher bribe or a more alluring prospect, co-operation with her was not to be looked for. Mrs. Basset, unlike her sister, was honest, but weak: he "had comfort there, she was assailable." Cutts, his quondam ally, was at the same time weak and dishonest—that is to say, weak through dishonesty, for in worldly matters—the great test, as people hold, of mental ability—he was strong enough: you could not do him at a horse-race or a game of chance or skill, but you might corrupt him to the full extent that money could go. Who was this Dr.

Brocas, who seemed to have some kind of authority over Claribel?

Brunton had never lived in the great world, and, moreover, the day when the learned civilian had flourished had long gone by. But Mrs. Cutts had paraded his name, and wealth, and connexions to himself as well as to Mr. Ashley, with equally mysterious hints as to what her niece might expect from his generosity; and though he knew how seldom truth escaped her lips, he fancied that Dr. Brocas was somebody in what concerned Claribel—a person to be conciliated or an obstacle to be removed.

Last of all came Claribel, though with her he must begin, as upon her disposition all must depend.

He reproached himself for the waywardness with which he had kept aloof from introduction on the previous evening. Jealousy and love had taken root in his bosom at the same instant, and while the last impelled him towards her, the first held him back. Pride, too, had assisted. Could he endure to see a coxcomb made welcome where he was received as a stranger? He would choose another time for speaking to her without the contact which was so hateful. Still, it was an opportunity lost, for where could he have had a better than in the midst of her family? No matter, it was lost; that reflection was useless now; the opportunity must be recovered.

And then, when he came to know her, how should he proceed?

Ask a man who plunges into an unknown forest at midnight which way he intends to turn his steps.

During the whole period of his connexion with the house of Temple Travers, Brunton had never entered a theatre. He had a name to make with Mr. Velters, which would have been compromised had any reports reached the managing partner of his keeping late hours, or mixing in gay and questionable society. To forego this amusement was one of the restraints which he put

upon himself while *en tutelle*, and, with a good reason for doing so, he resolved now to make up for the time he had lost.

That evening, therefore, and the next, and the one that followed it, when Claribel played, saw him alone in a private box at Mr. Wimple's theatre, with eyes and ears for her only. But this enjoyment, great as it was, could not long suffice: it was no better than a vivid dream, as long as he continued unknown. He must make the dream a reality.

The first step in the business was to break ground with Mr. Cutts. He wrote to him to come "in a quiet way" and dine, having one or two things which he wished to talk over; and as he knew that the best bait with the auctioneer was a good dinner, however "quiet," he named "The Wellington" as the *champ clos* for the gastronomic meeting. There was something appropriate in the locality: for once upon a time Thomas Cutts had officiated as groom-porter to the establishment when the place was under a different dynasty and dedicated to a different purpose: it was during the "half-pay" *régime* no longer referred to by Mr. Cutts.

As that gentleman was troubled with few scruples of any kind, and was quite impervious to the mere force of association, he accepted the invitation with the greatest pleasure, and was as punctual as the clock to the hour appointed.

There is no need to detail the *menu* of "The Wellington," nor praise the wine: if I observe, with respect to the latter, that its quality was exactly the reverse of the stuff which Mr. Cutts obliged his customers with, I have said enough on the subject. Neither is it necessary to repeat the whole of the conversation that passed between the two "merchants," but one or two passages in it may be desirable.

After speaking of the *soirée* in Mayfair, which Brunton said had been so agreeable, he came to the subject that interested him.

"Miss Page," he remarked, "is a very accomplished girl. I was quite surprised to find she was a niece of your wife. How long has she been on the stage?"

"Rather better than three months, I think," replied Mr. Cutts, indifferently.

"I have been so much out of the way of these things lately," continued Brunton, "that her name was perfectly new to me."

"Ah!" said Cutts, laconically.

"I didn't, in fact, know till after she began to read that she *was* related to Mrs. Cutts. It was little Julia Ashley who told me."

"Oh, she told you!" returned the auctioneer, whose words fell from him, contrary to his wont, like very slow bidding.

Brunton felt that there must be some reason for this reticence, but he did not observe upon it, satisfied that he should make him speak presently.

"Yes; she was very communicative, as she always is, and added that Lord Harry FitzLupus—that is your tall friend's name, I believe—was very sweet upon her."

"Did you agree with her?" asked Mr. Cutts.

Brunton winced a little at this question, but answered, with assumed carelessness: "Well, he talked to her a good deal, I fancy. Is he an old acquaintance?"

"Of whose?"

"Of Cl—— of Miss Page's—or, indeed, of yours?"

"I have known Lord Harry—as a public man—for some time," said Mr. Cutts, framing his reply cautiously.

"That was not what I asked, Cutts. How long has he been on visiting terms at your house?"

"Not very long."

"A month—a fortnight—or was he ever there before?"

"Yes, he was there before."

"But not exactly as a visitor? Ah! you can't say that! He had called on business—eh?"

Mr. Cutts, driven beyond his entrenchments, said

nothing, but holding a glass of claret to the light, admired its colour and drank it off.

"I see how it is, Cutts," resumed Brunton, "as plainly as if you had told me all. You're a fool for your pains to let me find it out for myself. I'm not so little upon town as not to know that there are few men so hard up as this Lord Harry. Of course he did not come to Mayfair to cultivate your acquaintance! Neither was he attracted by the *beaux yeux de madame*, though her eyes are fine enough for anybody. He preferred *les beaux yeux de votre cassette*, or rather Mr. Ashley's. He wanted money, and you got it for him!"

Mr. Cutts laughed.

"Well, Dick!" said he, "there's no use in denying it. We did accommodate him, in a small way."

"And unless I am deceived, Tom," returned Brunton, encouraging his friend's familiarity—"unless I am greatly deceived, you are not indisposed—at all events, Mrs. Cutts is not—to accommodate him still further."

"How do you mean?"

"My meaning is quite plain, and you can take me fast enough if it suits you. Listen to me, Tom! You and I have had things in hand before now which we wouldn't go out of our way to publish at full length in the *Times*. I am not in a worse position now than when those things happened—on the contrary: besides which, I see my way before me. You understand?"

Mr. Cutts nodded, and filled himself another glass of Château Margaux.

"Well, then. Look here! Lord Harry FitzLupus comes to you for money. You lend it, or get it for him—the same thing, as far as he is concerned. A part of the profit goes into your pocket—the rest into Ashley's: I need not tell *you* which has the lion's share. Lord Harry may come again, and, perhaps, be again accommodated, but that sort of thing can't go on for ever. He must break down at last, and then where are you? And what in the mean time do you gain by him? A few

hundreds, may be! The thousands go somewhere else. Now, if I were to put you,—you, yourself, Tom, not Ashley,—in the way of making thousands as dead certain as ever you turned up the king or threw sixes, don't you think I should be a better customer than this Harry FitzLupus?"

"Of course you would," replied Mr. Cutts, beginning to feel the force of Brunton's argument.

"And I'll do it, Tom," said his friend, "if you will meet me half way."

"In which direction?" asked Mr. Cutts, looking Brunton full in the face.

The Mincing-lane merchant returned the look with one equally steady. He lowered his voice till it was scarcely audible across the table—only Mr. Cutts had quick ears as well as eyes.

"In that of——Miss Page," said Brunton.

Mr. Cutts paused for a few moments before he made any reply. At last he said:

"My wife has a crotchet about that girl. It don't answer my book to put spokes in her wheel. She likes to have her way sometimes."

"Very often, I dare say. But what's to prevent her having her way——or thinking she has it?"

"Why—if you put it so—nothing."

"Let her go on, then, as she has begun. Let her encourage Lord Harry as much as she pleases. You needn't seem to interfere."

"But what use can I be of in the matter?"

"Oh, plenty. In the first place, you know Mr. Wimple?"

"Yes."

"As Claribel—Miss Page's—uncle, an introduction from you is open to no objection."

"There's no difficulty, certainly, about that."

"Very good. Then the sooner it takes place the better. Let it be to-night, before the play is over. That will be the beginning. We shall have more to say by-and-by. Another bottle of claret! Come, you must

Another, and another, and then primed for any mischief, had it even concerned his own daughter, Mr. Cutts put his arm in his friend's, and they went down stairs together. Brunton's brougham was waiting at the door in Piccadilly, and they drove off at once to the theatre.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN INTERVIEW.

MR. WIMPLE was one of the "highly-correct" class of managers, a model of strictness in all that related to propriety of conduct—behind the scenes. He showed, indeed, so much severity in this respect, that Miss Patch, the principal dresser, who had five-and-thirty years' experience of theatrical trials, was heard one day to declare, with more energy than grammar, that "she never knew such an austerior man."

Mr. Cutts expressed the same idea to Brunton, in different words.

"Wimple," he remarked, "keeps a remarkably tight hand over all his people; but," he added, by way of qualification, "perhaps his bark is worse than his bite."

"He overdoes it a little—on purpose—you think?" said Brunton.

"Well—yes. But I may be wrong, you know!" replied Mr. Cutts.

"Very true; you may. We all of us are sometimes."

To obtain access to the manager of a theatre is, generally speaking, a more difficult undertaking than the attempt to approach a Prime Minister. A stranger has no chance of success, and if Mr. Cutts had not been known at the stage door as "the relative" of Miss

Page and—still better—as "the business-friend" of Mr. Wimple, he might have asked for admission in vain. Under the circumstances, however, he passed the janitor unchallenged, and after threading a number of intricate passages, familiar enough to Mr. Cutts, but very perplexing to Brunton, who stumbled over "properties" at every turn, and ran against everybody he met, the two friends eventually reached the green-room just as the manager, arrayed in ducal cap and mantle, had left the stage.

I cannot say whether it was owing to the natural despotism of his character, or to a lack of histrionic genius, but the parts which Mr. Wimple most affected were those of the tyrants and usurpers who are always seizing somebody's crown and banishing somebody "on pain of death." This habitual exercise of power imparted an air of majesty to Mr. Wimple's features which never entirely left them. It was newly minted at the moment that Mr. Cutts presented his friend, "Mr. Brunton, of Mincing-lane," with an emphasis on the locality that was meant for more than met the ear.

Duke Frederick (Mr. Wimple), clearing from his brow the haughty scowl with which he had, a moment before, transfixed two "supers," his attendant lords, but retaining all his ducal dignity, expressed in courteous terms the satisfaction he felt at making Brunton's acquaintance.

"You have done us the honour more than once lately —or my eye has deceived me, sir—to visit our poor establishment. I may presume, I trust, that you consider our revival an efficient one?"

"Nothing can possibly be better done," said Brunton, warmly.

"Itis indifferently well mounted, sir," observed the manager, with mock humility.

"And the acting," continued Brunton, "is beyond praise. A more charming *Rosalind* it is impossible to conceive! There is only one part in which I confess to a little disappointment."

"What is that, sir?" asked Mr. Wimple, rath-

anxiously; "be candid, sir; I like to hear the opinions of competent persons."

Brunton looked round the room, but there was nobody within earshot. He lowered his voice, however, as he replied:

"If you, sir, now, had played *Jaques*——"

"Oh, I see, I see," exclaimed Mr. Wimple, greatly relieved—"yes, yes—you are quite right. The cast might, no doubt, have been exactly what yourself and the public desire, but where could I have found a *Duke Frederick?* I don't mind telling you confidentially, Mr. Brunton, that except myself I don't consider there's an actor on the London boards who is fit to play that part. The *Duke*, sir, must be essentially the gentleman!"

"I need not say, then," said Brunton, "that he was most fittingly represented."

"I am glad you liked it," replied the manager, quite in good humour, "for apart from the difficulty I alluded to, *Duke Frederick* is, I confess, a favourite with me. Our *Rosalind*, too, as you say, is very good. I don't mind praising her before her uncle, or even before her face, for here she comes! Miss Page," pursued Mr. Wimple, turning to Claribel, as she entered the room, "here is a gentleman, a friend of your uncle, Mr. Cutts —Mr. Brunton, of Mincing-lane, one of our most esteemed theatrical critics—who is much pleased with your acting."

The words "your uncle, Mr. Cutts," grated very unpleasantly on Claribel's ear. The relationship had been too recently asserted to be familiar; the man himself had so many points about him that were disagreeable: to be his friend was no great recommendation. She bowed to Brunton, but scarcely raised her eyes.

"This is not the first time, Miss Page," he said, "that I have had the pleasure of meeting you."

Claribel looked up; she had a faint recollection of having seen Brunton before, but could not remember where.

Mr. Cutts

"I see you're at fault, Clary," he said, "but it's not to be wondered at: where one party is reading and the other only listening, there's not much room for talking."

Claribel still looked puzzled.

"I was fortunate enough," said Brunton, "to be one of the company at my friend's house in Mayfair, the other evening, when you read the part in which I have since seen you——every night you have played!"

Nothing could have been simpler than this speech; but the low tone in which the last words were uttered conveyed more than a common meaning.

Claribel was conscious of it, and felt embarrassed how to reply.

"Yes," continued Brunton, in the same subdued voice, "every night. I could never tire of witnessing such perfect acting—though, indeed, it is not acting, it is nature itself."

"I am sure," said Claribel, forcing herself to speak, "you greatly overrate my efforts. I am but a beginner."

"They who begin like you," he replied, "have nothing more to learn."

Claribel resolved to see only the ordinary form of compliment in his words.

"I fear," she said, smiling, "that Mr. Wimple mistook when he commended your critical ability."

"Perhaps so," returned Brunton; "but there are circumstances under which criticism becomes an impossibility."

"An erroneous estimate excludes it altogether."

"Or one that too truly appreciates."

"But to pass judgment on any question without examination must surely take away from the value of the opinion!"

"There are some things which appeal so directly to the feelings that we never reason about them. It is the effect which we discern and not the manner in which it has been wrought."

"That code is a new one."

"It is as old," replied Brunton, looking earnestly

Claribel, and lowering his voice to a whisper—"as old as ——"

"Miss Page!" cried the call-boy, appearing at the door.

"Claribel turned hastily, perhaps in obedience to the summons, perhaps because of the word with which the sentence ended, and from the sudden flush on her cheek it is probable she heard it.

While this brief dialogue was passing, Mr. Cutts had found something very particular to say to the manager, and drew him aside for the purpose of communicating it, or certainly the severe Mr. Wimple would not have permitted so positive an infraction of regulations which the very green-room cried out against; for on the pier-glass —into which every one peeped as a matter of course, just to see how they looked—was stuck a written notice, signed "P. Wimple," which said, "All conversation with the ladies of this establishment is strictly prohibited."

A stranger, however, might be allowed to be ignorant of this law until it was pointed out to him, and in the preoccupation of the moment Mr. Wimple had doubtless forgotten to name it to the new comer. Green-room gossip is occasionally ill-natured, and some of those who were professionally tongue-tied in the presence of the opposite sex had been heard to say, amongst each other, that "the manager's memory was convenient:" that was the only remark they wished to make!

This scandal, for scandal of course it was, had most likely been provoked by some such act of sternness as that which Mr. Wimple exhibited immediately he left off speaking to Mr. Cutts. After Claribel's departure, several members of the company had entered the room, and *Silvius* and *Phebe*, not quite perfect in their parts, were unwittingly rehearsing in a corner, when the manager's scrutinising glance detected them. The ducal scowl resumed its place upon his lofty brow, he strode up to the offenders, and bitterly denounced their proceedings.

"Not a word in reply, Mr. Snibson!" he thundered—"not a s[illegible] from your lips! Such glaring indecorum

admits of no defence. The temple of Melpomene, sir, shall be sacred as the temple of Diana while I am the master here. You will attend at the treasury, Mr. Snibson, on Saturday next—for the last time! Miss Horrocks, the encouragement you have given this young man, in defiance of my express commands, deserves the heaviest censure. I mulct you in a fortnight's salary."

Mr. Cutts raised his eyebrows: the movement was scarcely perceptible, but Brunton saw it, and understood that Mr. Wimple was giving himself a character.

The manager confirmed his impression.

"The purity of the profession," he said, addressing Brunton—"the purity of the profession *must* be upheld, or society will be overthrown. I have responsibilities, Mr. Brunton, to which other men are strangers. I feel them, sir, as a father, as a manager, and as a man!"

This, as we have seen, was a favourite phrase of Mr. Wimple's: he had already made it an excuse to Mrs. Basset for not raising Claribel's salary: it came now to the rescue of insulted virtue. One thing was peculiar in Mr. Wimple's sense of his responsibilities: like the policy of Cardinal Mazarin, it always tended to fill his pocket.

Brunton, who was desirous of making himself popular amongst Claribel's companions, ventured to suggest an act of leniency on the part of the manager.

Mr. Wimple frowned, and shook his head at first, but finally suffered himself to be persuaded. He had vindicated the majesty of outraged propriety and shown his own authority: it was a question, moreover, in his own mind, whether his arbitrary decree would have stood good in law, had the point been contested; so he graciously pardoned the delinquents.

Another "call" thinned the green-room, and Brunton was left alone with Mr. Cutts.

"What did you tell him?" asked the former.

"That he might *depend upon you*. Was I right?"

"Quite right. Does he require any proof of it?"

"He said there was one box, on the ground tier, not let for the season."

"I understand. Tell him I'll take it—or, stay, I'll do that myself. But what has become of Claribel?"

"I suppose she is still 'on.'"

"She has been absent a long while. You know the house better than I do. Just go and see!"

In about five minutes Mr. Cutts returned.

"Well, where is she?" demanded Brunton, eagerly.

"I left her at the wing," replied Mr. Cutts. "She said she was wanted again directly."

Brunton could not follow her there. He remained where he was, but not without showing strong signs of impatience. At last he knew by the applause of the audience that the play was over. He hurried to the stage, and just caught a glimpse of Claribel as she disappeared on the opposite side.

He waited—and waited—and when next he inquired, he found she had left the house.

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CHAPTER XIX.

MAKING FRIENDS.

If Richard Brunton had felt unsettled by dreams of ambition after his visit to Broadstone, he did not gain repose from his interview with Claribel: dreams even more absorbing now filled his mind, rendering every occupation distasteful that was not associated with her.

Instead, therefore, of going to the City as usual on the following morning, he mounted his horse and set off into the country. His intention was to ride miles away, and he persisted in it for the first hour, but compelled at last by the inequalities of the road to abate the speed at

which he set out, his thoughts as he slackened his rein reverted into the track they had followed all night, and he found almost unconsciously that he had turned his horse's head and was no longer increasing the distance from London.

"If I can think of nothing but her," he muttered, "as well this way as another!" And at the end of another hour he had made a circuit of several miles and re-entered the town on the side where Claribel lived.

He knew her address, and resolved to ride past the house in the hope of seeing her. He paced backwards and forwards several times, examining every window with an eager eye, but his scrutiny was unrewarded: no Claribel was visible. He then debated within himself about calling, and eventually made up his mind to do so: though he had never spoken to Mrs. Basset, the fact of his having met her at her brother-in-law's, besides his introduction to Claribel, afforded him an excuse for inquiring. He accordingly dismounted and rang the bell —once—twice—three times—but no one answered it. After another impatient pause he was raising his hand to pull again, when a little, mild-looking man opened a side-door from the shop and timorously asked what might be his business.

"I suppose," he remarked, "the maid is gone out; she often does, sir, when her mistress is from home."

Brunton, still holding his horse's bridle, took off his hat to the new-comer, whom he rightly conjectured was the silversmith himself.

"I wished," he said, "to pay my respects to Mrs. Basset. I had the pleasure of meeting her a few evenings since at her sister's in Mayfair."

"I am very sorry," returned the lady's husband, "that you should have had the trouble of coming"—he glanced at Brunton's horse—"I dare say a long way, for my wife—Mrs. Basset—has gone out for the day."

"And—and—Miss Page, too?" asked Brunton.

"Oh, yes," said the little man, rubbing his hands

joyously, "my niece is with her. It's so seldom the dear girl gets a holiday! The day's so fine, it must do her good! I should like to have gone with them myself"—he half sighed, then tried to look brisk again—"but business, business, you know, sir, must be attended to!"

Business! He had been all the morning in the shop, and had exchanged a silver thimble for one bought a week before.

"A country excursion, I suppose," said Brunton, who saw that Mr. Basset did not object to relieve the toils of traffic with a little gossip.

"Well,—some would call it the country, and some would not. It depends upon where they happen to live themselves. Now, *we* think we're almost in the country, for it's full a mile to Hyde Park Corner, and I can remember the time when you had to cross the Five Fields to get from Sloane-street to Grosvenor-place, but that, of course, is a good many years ago, when I was a boy; still it isn't quite the town, and further off, you know, must be more in the country than this is."

"I should infer, then, from what you say, that Mrs. Basset has not gone a day's journey by railway."

"A day's journey by railway! Lord bless you, it's scarcely an hour's journey on foot! I've walked it often and often within that time. How far, now, do you call it from here to Putney Bridge?"

"I should think," said Brunton, "about three and a half, or, at most, four miles."

"Barely three," exclaimed the little man, with the air of a first-rate pedestrian. "I can do a mile in twenty minutes, any day, except when my corns are troublesome. Well, Vallombrosa Villa is a good bit on this side the bridge. To be sure, you have to go a little way down the lane, opposite Fulham Church, but even then it's not three miles."

"Vallombrosa Villa?" said Brunton; "I think I have seen it."

"Of course you have," replied Mr. Basset, "if you've been up the river. You can't help seeing it from the river; it's right upon the Thames; the willows in the grounds actually dip into the water. You must have seen it."

"Now I recollect, I distinctly have. May I ask who lives there?"

"Oh," answered Mr. Basset, rubbing his hands, "a very great friend of ours, and, I may say"—here he lowered his voice to a sort of confidential whisper—"I may say—a very great man, too—a very learned person, sir, an astonishing person. I don't suppose there's his equal in the kingdom—in some things."

"You must be proud of such an acquaintance," said Brunton. "Is the name of this aston——I mean, of your learned friend, any secret?"

The silversmith looked up sharply, but the half-uttered sneer had left no trace on Brunton's lip.

"A secret! Dear me, no! Dr. Brocas is the owner of 'Vallombrosa,'—he never adds 'Villa,' himself,—I can't tell why. When I say owner, I mean he lives there; whose the property really is I don't know."

"Dr. Brocas!" repeated Brunton. "Oh!"

"If you were at the Mayfair party the other night you've seen him. He's not a man to be mistaken. A tall, handsome man,—a good deal taller than I am,—and stouter,—much stouter. High forehead, bald,—wears a velvet cap,—very intellectual,—fine figure of a man,—I may say, a noble presence. Dignified manner! Oh, yes. That's Dr. Brocas. Not two like him in England; perhaps not one!"

"I remember him perfectly well from your description. He sees a good deal of company, I dare say."

"He has seen the best in the land, Mrs. Basset tells me. Given it up now. Fond of nothing but music, and books, and pictures."

"And female society, apparently!"

"Oh, yes, the Doctor never seems to be so happy as

when he is with the ladies. There's my niece, Claribel Page,—that's to say, Mrs. Basset's niece,—but it's all one, for I couldn't love her better if she were my own daughter,—well, the Doctor can scarcely bear to have her out of his sight; he seems almost as fond of her as I am!"

"He is related to her, perhaps, in the same degree?"

"Lord bless you, no! He's not in any way connected with us! Though Claribel's father was a gentleman born."

"Oh, indeed!"

"I can assure you, sir, he was," said the little silversmith, shaking his head mysteriously, as if he knew all about it,—"you may see in a moment that Claribel has good blood in her veins. But, I'm sure I beg your pardon. I'm keeping you there holding your horse when I dare say you want to be going."

"Not at all, not at all, Mr. Basset. It gives me great pleasure. I'm an idle man, like yourself. I've nothing at all to do."

The little silversmith winced slightly at this remark.

"Oh!" he said, "I've got plenty to do—in general: not so much, perhaps, as I might have over the counter if I lived in Regent street, but quite enough work behind it."

Poor man! He had, indeed, more work than custom; for he was always busy, perfecting the works of old-fashioned silver watches which nobody came in to buy.

"At all events," said Brunton, "I am very much obliged by your politeness. But to return to Dr. Brocas. He is a gentleman, then, of independent fortune, and an old friend of yours?"

"He has a large fortune, I believe," replied Mr. Basset; "but," he conscientiously added, "we have not known him very long."

Brunton's brow became clouded for an instant, but he did no[illegible] Basset went on:

"The Doctor, as I mentioned before, is a great lover of the Fine Arts: his house is quite a gem. Not such another place to be seen anywhere—so I'm told—for I haven't travelled much myself. But where he stands quite alone, sir, is in the law; there nobody can touch him. He has been kind enough to take up a little affair of mine now——"

"What!" interrupted Brunton, smiling, "do you go to law, Mr. Basset?"

"God forbid, sir, God forbid! But advice, you know, sir—advice is sometimes necessary."

"Very true. But what kind of advice can he give you? A physician is not exactly the person to settle a legal difficulty."

"A physician, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Basset. Dr. Brocas is a Doctor of Civil Law. My little affair is a disputed succession; a will case, sir. There's not another man in England who can see the bearings of a question of that sort like Dr. Brocas."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I misunderstood. Your case, then, is intricate."

"Why, you see," said the little man, garrulous on all subjects, but more particularly so when a new one arose that affected himself—"why, you see, sir, it *is* intricate, and it is *not*. I was my aunt's heir"—(certain people always plunge *in medias res*, as if the strangers to whom they address themselves knew the whole of their history) —"and by rights I ought to have had all her money, whether it was much or little, because it mostly came to her from our family, though I don't mean to say she wasn't at liberty to leave some little trifling remembrances to personal friends. But this Treasurer, sir, of Saint Trephine's Hospital——"

Brunton stared at the sudden introduction of the functionary alluded to, but seeing the sort of man Mr. Basset was, did not interrupt him.

"This Treasurer of Saint Trephine's," pursued the silversmith, "was no personal friend, because if she did

break her leg in getting out of a 'bus, and was laid up in the hospital for ever so long, he didn't set it for her. Then, again, that Mrs. Hornybeak! If ever a woman had a bad word to say of any one, of my aunt, in particular, she's the person; and Mrs. Basset has heard language from her, scores and scores of times, which I'll not venture to repeat. I've heard her, too, myself, though I kept out of her way as much I could. And don't you think, sir, that bad language travels to people's ears? Why the very birds of the air will carry the news to them. Anyhow, parrots will; and Mrs. Hornybeak had a parrot—she's got it still, I hear—that always swore when Mrs. Meggot's name was mentioned, especially over a cup of tea. I ask you then, sir, does it stand to reason that my aunt should look upon her as the best friend she had in the world, any more than the Treasurer of Saint Trephine's?"

"My good sir," replied Brunton, who began rather to tire of this branch of the family history, but yet was unwilling to break off the conversation, in the hope of hearing something more about Dr. Brocas and Claribel —"my good sir, there is very often no act in a person's life so incomprehensibly unjust as that which closes it. Caprice is the very mainspring of a man's mind who has anything to leave. It does not surprise me in the least —on the contrary, the more deserving you may be, the better I understand the reason that your aunt should have disinherited you."

"But she didn't do so, sir," exclaimed the silversmith. "I was not disinherited. She left me her property."

"What do you complain of, then?" asked Brunton.

"What I complain of, sir, is this: that she should have left the money to all three of us."

"Divided it amongst you? And you get only a third, instead of the whole?"

"I shall, probably, get nothing."

"How is that? I don't exactly comprehend."

"When I say she left her money to all of us, I mean

that she did so unreservedly to each. There was no division, no separate bequests."

"But surely the date of the wills would set that matter at rest."

"So it might, only they were all written on the same day, and which was first, and which was last, nobody knows. And that's the reason why the Treasurer and Mrs. Hornybeak put in their *caveats*."

"And what does Dr. Brocas say?" inquired Brunton, glad to see land in that direction.

"He says the thing's plain enough, if we can get the witnesses into court. Now, unluckily, mine can't be found. I've been away from the shop a dozen times—and lost I don't know how much business—trying to hunt 'em out all through Islington and Pentonville, and I can't say where. Now, Mrs. Hornybeak—of course she and Mrs. Basset don't speak since this matter turned up, but we've heard it from others—Mrs. Hornybeak has her two ready—they can swear to the hour my aunt did it—and they vow and declare that she never went near Saint Trephine's afterwards, but came straight away home; and Mrs. Hornybeak turns up her nose at my claim—as much as she can, hi, hi, hi—for I should tell you she has a hook, a regular hook, just like her own parrot—and says she knows if ever a will really *was* made in my favour—think of that, sir, as if I had—had—con-coc-coc-ted it myself, sir—it was written and certified to the first thing in the morning, because, she says, that after ten o'clock my witnesses are known never to have been sober, and besides that, she adds, my aunt expressed herself—I use her own words—'in most undignified terms'—I believe she means indignant, poor woman—towards her nephew, meaning me, sir."

"So that, whichever way it ends, there will be some nice picking for the lawyers, And you think Dr. Brocas can help you through?"

"If any one can do it, he can. That is to say, as far as advice goes, for he does not practise now. Of course not, after having been a Judge."

"I am glad to hear you are in such good hands. it were in my power, Mr. Basset, to be of any service—permit me to give you my card—I'm sure I should be only too happy. The respect I entertain for Mrs. Basset—the admiration I feel for the talents of Miss Page—your own personal respectability—each is a sufficient motive. I hope I may be allowed the privilege of calling upon you again, and talking once more on the subject."

"Only too glad, sir," returned Mr. Basset, "whenever you think proper to do me the favour."

"Good morning then, Mr. Basset," said Mr. Brunton, setting his foot at last in the stirrup and mounting,—"pray present my compliments to Mrs. Basset and Miss Page, and say I hope to be more fortunate on the next occasion."

He shook hands with the little silversmith, who stood at his door to watch him out of sight as Brunton turned towards Fulham.

"I had reckoned upon the wife," soliloquised Brunton, "and she is half gained now I have accidentally secured the husband. He is a poor creature, though. Too good-natured by half to have a will of his own. However, he seems to idolise Claribel, and that feeling always creates influence, especially with a simple girl like her. There is another person, it seems, who idolises her also. Old! What has age to do with the question? It only makes it more likely. A clever, accomplished man, who has seen the world and got tired of it, is infinitely more dangerous than that fool FitzLupus. He appeals to her rising tastes and inclinations, cultivates them, turns them to his own account; her mind is formed by him, and then—she is his own. These credulous people see nothing of this. It must be my province—carefully—to undeceive them, while I keep my own end in view. For Vallombrosa, then! How romantic! If the walls are not too high, I may chance to get a glimpse of her yet."

He set his horse in motion, but was stopped almost

immediately at a toll-bar by a carriage which was coming through. He drew up on one side to allow it to pass. Two ladies were in the carriage: Miss Travers and Margaret Nalders. They also saw and recognised him. It was the first time they had met since he saved the life of Alice's friend. Brunton took off his hat as the carriage moved on, but it had proceeded only a few paces, when Miss Travers put her hand on the check-string, and looking out of the window made a sign for Brunton to approach. He immediately rode up, and was received with a degree of cordiality by both the ladies, which, though nothing more than his due, after the service he had rendered, was greater than he had anticipated. The conversation which ensued, though brief, was animated, and it had the effect of altering Brunton's destination for that day.

"This is not the occasion," said Alice, who was the chief spokeswoman, "for expressing our thanks for what we owe you; but we are returning to-day to the old house in the City, to pass a few days with my grandpapa. As that is so much nearer to your place of business, perhaps we may hope to see you there during our stay."

Miss Nalders expressed the same desire by a look which did not escape Brunton.

There was not the slightest necessity, he said, for thanks; he had only performed an act of duty; to have done anything that met with such warm approval was in itself a sufficient reward. Still he would not forego the pleasure which was held out by the kind invitation of Miss Travers—and so forth, all uttered in good set terms, and with becoming modesty.

The carriage then moved on, and Brunton, after a moment's hesitation, slowly followed.

"Not to-day, then—not to-day!" he said, as he gave one glance towards Fulham. "I am convinced she will prove an invaluable ally. Her gratitude is evidently sin-

cere. One may be deceived by words, but looks seldom lie!"

So saying, he took the road that led directly homeward.

CHAPTER XX.

A FRESH PROJECT.

BRUNTON did not waste another four-and-twenty hours in mere speculative dreaming. To make up for lost time, as well as to improve present opportunity, he was early at work next day. There would have been quite enough to occupy him till the moment he had fixed for calling in Broad-street, had he devoted himself solely to his own affairs, but those of another person came in for a share of his attention. This person was Mr. Ashley, who was in the habit of paying Brunton a visit every now and then, to assist by his guidance the progress of the machine to which he had given the first impulse. With no avowed personal interest, however—though the pupil knew very well what the master meant when the latter advised any particular line of action.

He came now to open a new field for Brunton's enterprise. From peculiar information which had reached him, he felt satisfied that India offered opportunities which had never yet been presented as he now beheld them; but they required careful handling, and the use they might be turned to depended on extraneous support.

"I am nothing, my dear, in this business myself," he said to Brunton, after he had adverted to the subject in general terms; "it's all for your good, you know."

Brunton smiled, and so did the Hebrew, but he made no pause.

"The sooner, therefore, you set about this thing I'm telling you of, the more money you'll make by it. But before you break ground you must feel your way! Now it's not so much an affair of capital—at all events, just now—as of credit, and if we—that is, you—go the right way to work, there will be no difficulty as to that."

"Let me hear the details of your scheme," said Brunton.

"At present," replied Mr. Ashley, "we will speak in parables. You must see the object, as in a glass, darkly. There is an event to come off in India—it may not be to-day, it may not be to-morrow, but one of these days it is sure to happen—and this event will have very important consequences. Some, no doubt, will suffer by it—others on the contrary, will gain; that's commerce all over, my dear—regular profit and loss—so nobody here can make any objection."

"Would it matter much if they did?" asked Brunton.

"Not greatly—at least to you or me," returned the Hebrew. "Well, the pear is not ripe yet, as I've said already, but it's ripening, and we who are wise must be ready to catch the fruit when it falls. India is a very large country, and it can't be expected that in a very large country every one should be contented and happy. Fifty years ago there were, in India, as many native princes—kings, rajahs, and what not—as there are great men at this moment sitting in a certain room in Leadenhall-street. Now, fifty years is not an eternity: people don't forget everything in that time, least of all when harm has been done. Then, there are other matters. Some folks have their prejudices. You may not fancy a man's habits, I may dislike his religion—that kind of thing prevails all over the world: I don't see why it shouldn't be the case in India! Perhaps it is, perhaps not—I don't pretend to say; but if anybody were to ask me what I really thought on the subject, I might, if I liked, give them a tolerably plain answer."

"Its tenor, after what you have observed," said

Brunton, "is not very hard to divine. You apprehend a general outbreak in India?"

"I don't apprehend it," replied Mr. Ashley, coolly.

"You expect it, then."

Mr. Ashley laughed.

"And how," continued Brunton, "will that benefit commerce? Its real interest consists in upholding peace and security everywhere."

"Very likely, as a general rule, but all rules have their exceptions. Besides, I wasn't talking of the interests of commerce. I'm not lecturing at Crosby Hall. I spoke of something nearer home. I've known parties who found it most to their account to fish in troubled waters."

"A little less metaphor, Mr. Ashley, will make the subject clearer."

"Well, then, supposing this outbreak is—as you think I believe—coming, but not yet! It's an event one ought to be prepared for. You know the French proverb: 'Revolutions are not made with rose-water.' The mainspring that sets them going is money. Now there is plenty of money in India. The shroffs, as they call their native bankers, the bazaar-merchants, have monetary dealings on the largest scale in all parts of Asia. A single line of theirs in Hindostáni, which neither you nor I could read, will be cashed at sight wherever it is presented, just like one of Temple Travers's cheques in the London market. So, you see, any amount may be raised for a purpose when necessary. This, however, is beside the question at present, though it may have its consequences hereafter. What it imports us to do, at this moment, is to make money while it can be made. Investments in Indian produce, as I learn from tolerably sure authority, may be effected just now on very advantageous terms, by pushing them in the right direction. If you were out there, and saw with your own eyes, you could do it yourself, but as it must be done by those who are on the spot, the people employed must be such

as enjoy general confidence. The first step, therefore, is to establish business relations with one or more of the first houses in Calcutta. I suppose you see now what I'm coming to?"

"I believe I do," said Brunton, who had been listening attentively; "but go on."

"Nobody knows better than yourself," resumed Mr. Ashley, "the position of the firm of Temple Travers. It stands A 1 all over the world. The first good luck that ever befel that house began in the East,—was brought to it by *The Queen of Sheba*, which hangs, in miniature, in the hall there in Broad-street,—and the luck has never turned. God forbid it should! Neither has the firm turned away from the original source of its wealth. India, as I need not tell you, is still their mark, and to be introduced by them to a house of business in India, is to give you the means of doing whatever you have a mind to accomplish."

"It was always my intention," said Brunton, "sooner or later, to apply to the Broad-street people for such an introduction as you suggest, but I did not wish to be precipitate. Mr. Velters has some faith in my enterprise, but he is apt to ask curious questions."

"Let him ask what he pleases," returned Mr. Ashley, "you have a simple answer ready. A friend has given you good information: he won't push the inquiry further, because he knows the fact to be as I have stated it, and the best proof of that will be shown by the nature of his own investments. Depend upon it, you'll very soon hear, through Browser or somebody, that Temple Travers have gone in largely for Indian produce."

"After all, then," said Brunton, smiling, "you have come round to the commercial view of the question."

"I never meant anything else," replied Mr. Ashley, "as far as we are concerned. To do business peaceably and quietly, under the shadow of a great man's wing, is as much as we need trouble ourselves about. But that don't prevent us from knowing the reason why; and,

having that knowledge, we should be simpletons indeed if we did not endeavour to make our profit out of it."

The bantering tone in which Mr. Ashley began this conversation had completely disappeared at its close; so also had his alleged singleness of object. It was evident enough, if Brunton had not so perfectly understood the relations which subsisted between himself and Mr. Ashley, that a common interest united them in this newest and most important project.

"There is no occasion," said Mr. Ashley, after a short pause, "for me to enter into any further explanations. When once the vessel is under weigh, you can steer her as well as I. The material point is to get her off the stocks. When shall you be able to see Mr. Velters?"

"I hope to do so to-day," replied Brunton. "I was going down to the house this afternoon. In fact, I had an appointment there."

"With him?" asked Mr. Ashley.

"Why, not exactly," answered Brunton, "though I thought I might probably see him."

The Hebrew dealer was one of those men who are intuitively suspicious, even of they know not exactly what, and his quick eye was searching every line of Brunton's countenance as he spoke; but it exhibited no sign of an ulterior purpose.

"I should have said something to you about this Indian affair," continued Mr. Ashley, "at Mrs. Cutts's party, the other night, only you gave me no opportunity, you went away so soon. By-the-by, what do you think of the Dr. Brocas we saw there? He seems a remarkable man!"

"I did not take much notice," said Brunton, indifferently; "I never met him before—neither have I seen him since."

"I have the advantage of you, then," returned Mr. Ashley, "for he paid me a visit only two days ago. It seems he has a passion for everything that relates to art,

alive or dead. As my commodity is still-life—though if my daughters were professional, I flatter myself they would make a noise"—(the young ladies generally contrived to do that, without the professional qualification) —"he came to see what I had in that way, and we did a little business together. I showed him several nice things, mostly in Dresden china, which took his fancy very much. His taste and knowledge are first-rate, and, like all men of that sort, price never stops him."

"You are fortunate in picking up such a client; but for you to be lucky is nothing new. Where does he live?"

"A little way out of town, at a beautiful villa on the river, near Fulham."

"Have you seen it?"

"Yes; I always like to see people's places where I deal. Went yesterday; found that pretty actress there, Miss What's-her-name, that read the play to us, and her mother—I suppose it was."

Brunton wished he had been aware of the Dealer's journey, but he did not say so. It was his cue to appear to know nothing of Dr. Brocas, that he might learn the more.

Mr. Ashley went on; when he got upon this branch of his business he was talkative.

"Odd person, Dr. Brocas; appears to have fresh hobbies every day. When he came to see me, talked of nothing but Sèvres and Meissen; yesterday, was all for pictures; hardly looked at the china I took down; head full of the Italian masters; seems to know them all as well as I do; wants a particular Giorgione, for which, he says, he will give any money. I told him there was only one of the kind in England, and that was in the Marquis of Wolverton's gallery, an heirloom, not to be sold. He was quite mad upon it, however; vowed he must have it, begged, borrowed, or stolen; so, to keep him quiet, I told him I'd see what could be done, though I know it's no use."

"Has he many pictures?"

"Not where he is; he has but just come to Fulham; those he bought in Italy, he says, are at his place in the country, somewhere in Hampshire."

"And the house he now lives in is pretty, you say?"

"Very. Must have cost a good deal to fit it up; everything of the best and newest fashion. Quite a gem of a thing."

"I declare you quite excite my curiosity to get a peep at it. Perhaps you could take me down some day?"

"Oh, easily. The Doctor seems very liberal. Proud, I dare say, to show off. What I like about him is his gay, easy temper; nothing seems to put him out."

"That is agreed, then. And now for something of a more serious nature. This will be about the time to find Mr. Velters."

It was the time also when Brunton expected he should find Alice Travers.

The confederates parted, taking different ways in the street, but each in the full belief that he was following the high road to fortune.

CHAPTER XXI.

SOMETHING MORE THAN AN ALLY.

MR. ASHLEY'S communication had not been made without giving Brunton motive for reflection—though scant time was allowed him to think before he was called upon to act.

But he was one to whom the *coup d'œil* was habitual, and while on his way to Broad-street he examined the whole bearings of the question.

There could be no doubt that, in a mercantile point of view, Mr. Ashley's advice was good. The Hebrew dealer's information was always reliable; Brunton had had proof of that before. Then his interests were involved in the issue in more ways than one. A highly successful speculation would give Mr Ashley a large return for whatever advance he might choose to make in setting it going; and when Brunton had realised his own profits, it might suit his friend to claim the ten thousand pounds for which he held Brunton's bond, and this would be an easy way of obtaining a release from an obligation which, although never absolutely pressed on the debtor's attention, was always more or less implied in a thousand nameless ways.

So far the aspect of the affair was all that could be desired. Was there any other under which it could be considered.

What had been Mr. Ashley's words?

"Some, no doubt, will suffer by it—others, on the contrary, will gain."

It is true he had gone on to observe that this was an axiom of commerce, though Brunton was well aware the statement was fallacious—for the fair and free interchange of produce for money entails no loss on either side, but, on the contrary, is creative of mutual profit—a point within the merest tyro's comprehension. He might set that down, therefore, as a mere *façon de parler*, but for his knowledge that Mr. Ashley never said anything without a meaning.

Brunton felt convinced that he intended something more than a vague allusion to the far-off consequences of an unsettled state of government. His thoughts went back instinctively to the interview between himself and the Hebrew dealer in Finsbury-square. He remembered the expression of Mr. Ashley's countenance when he first spoke of the house of Temple Travers, and it had never been absent from Brunton's mind that the eagerness with which he had adopted the fortunes of a perfect stranger was wholly inexplicable. Could there be anything in

this new project that was likely, at some future time, to prove mischievous to the colossal firm? That consideration would, of necessity, make Brunton pause before he tied himself down to Mr. Ashley's proposition, his own best interests depending on the stability of the Broad-street establishment, in a way of which the other had no idea, at present; and to keep Mr. Ashley in ignorance of a matter that affected Brunton so personally must be one of his chiefest cares for the future.

But to counterbalance the suspicion that harm was intended towards the house of Temple Travers, came the recollection of Mr. Ashley's having said that the scheme must be judged of by the proceedings of Mr. Velters. If the astute managing partner, whose whole life had been passed in the closest examination of the opportunities of commerce, were himself embarked in the great Indian venture, then the question resolved itself into the simplest elements. Brunton was only following a lead already begun, and in asking for an opening on his own account, merely pursued the course which every merchant would take who desired an extension of business. When he reflected, too, upon the enormous capital of the great firm, their unbounded credit, the secure system on which they transacted their affairs, and the wealth which had been realised almost beyond the possibility of a shock, he came to the conclusion that he was raising apprehensions upon premises that had no foundation. The essential thing for him to do was to watch Mr. Ashley with the utmost care, implicitly follow his instructions if they tended really to his own advantage, or throw him over—if that were the better course—when the time came for doing without him.

"Je dormirai en lièvre," said Brunton, as he wound up his reflections: "nobody shall catch me with my eyes shut: not even you, my Hebrew friend!"

There was some difference between Brunton's reception now and that which greeted him on the day he first appeared before Mr. Velters. The wooden expression rer[illegible]ye was as cold as before, the mechani-

cally thrust-out hand as horny as ever, but the rigour which subsisted as between principal and subordinate had abated, and Mr. Velters actually suggested a chair. It acceptance was witnessed through the glass door by Browser's colleagues, and it had the effect with them of raising the firm of Brunton and Co. to a higher premium than, in the estimation of Temple Travers's clerks, they had ever yet stood at.

To record the dialogue which took place between Brunton and Mr. Velters would be scarcely more amusing than to transcribe a page from either of their ledgers: its result is all that need be quoted. It, however, gave the Managing Partner a much higher opinion of the young merchant to find him in possession of information which he, himself, had only very recently acquired, and that through an exclusive channel; and this fact had no small weight—though other causes might have operated—in inducing him to lend an ear to Brunton's representations. In brief, it was settled that the support of the great house in Broad-street should be given to the little one in Mincing-lane, in all that related to Indian transactions, and the negotiating parties separated on terms more advantageous to the rising firm than it had ever yet enjoyed.

When Brunton rose to take leave, after he had politely expressed his hope that Mrs. Velters and the family at Broadstone were well, and had received the usual common-place reply of a man who cares nothing for his wife and—to all appearance—little for his family, he observed:

"I am about, sir, to avail myself of the opportunity of being in Broad-street to pay my respects in-doors, being aware that the ladies are now staying here."

"Yes," said Mr. Velters, "they arrived yesterday. I am not sure, though, that you will find them at home, for I thought I saw the carriage go out. Miss Nalders, sir, is a most amiable person. You could not, physically speaking, have performed a more meritorious action than

when you extricated her from her late peril. We all highly appreciate it."

"Praise from Sir Hubert Stanley!" said Brunton, to himself, quoting from his play-going recollections. "I hope I have not missed them."

Mr. Velters, however, was right; the carriage had gone out, but on further inquiry Brunton found that it contained only Mr. Travers and Alice. Miss Nalders was at home.

Perhaps, with reference to Brunton's design, this was the best thing that could have happened.

He accordingly sent in his card, and was immediately admitted.

When he entered the old-fashioned drawing-room, which was described in the first chapter of this history, Margaret Nalders was sitting near one of the windows with her back to the light: at a certain time of life, when youth has lost somewhat of its freshness, the advantage of this position is not overlooked by the fair sex.

She rose on seeing Brunton, extended her hand, withdrew it before it could be taken, leant on the back of her chair for an instant, and then motioned to him to be seated.

There was a pause, which might have become awkward if Brunton had not spoken.

"I hope," he said, "that you have entirely recovered from the effects of the accident at Broadstone?"

"Quite," answered Miss Nalders, faintly; "that is to say, I feel them very little. There are times, perhaps, when I am not altogether myself again, when I remember the danger that you—that I——"

"A sudden shock of that kind," said Brunton, "must necessarily affect the nerves. By degrees, as you recover your strength, the impression you speak of will wear away."

"I imagine so," replied the lady, "though I am naturally of a nervous temperament. But," she continued, with emphasis, "there is one impression

that never can be obliterated: my deep sense of gratitude for the courage and humanity which saved a life of such little value, if not to myself at least to others."

"I am sure you are wrong," said Brunton, gallantly, "to set so low an estimate on your life as not to think that it is prized by numbers."

"By numbers!" repeated Miss Nalders, in a tone almost scornful, if scorn could be expressed in accents so soft as hers,—"Alice would regret me—yes, the darling child would weep for my loss—but numbers! Ah, Mr. Brunton, I must not deceive myself. There is no penalty so severe as that which we pay for self-deception."

"But in this case," returned Brunton, rather more earnestly, "the error is on the opposite side. Suppose, for an instant, that I waive all personal considerations: the eminent services which you have rendered, from her childhood, to Miss Temple Travers, must alone endear you to the hearts of all her relatives and friends! It is barely ten minutes since I heard Mr. Velters mention your name in terms of the very highest commendation."

The colour came quickly to the cheek of Margaret Nalders.

"Mr. Velters!" she exclaimed, and the tone was no longer doubtful; "he is a good judge of the qualities of a woman."

Then, as if her feelings had betrayed her into an indiscretion:

"Mr. Velters is an excellent, a most upright, well-meaning man, and his praise must be most gratifying to any one fortunate enough to deserve it; but what I would say is, that he cannot, from his habits of life, be exactly in the position to understand the nicer shades of feminine character. I value his good opinion highly—very highly—but that remains outside the circle I have drawn."

"Which," said Brunton, "has far too narrow a radius, believe me."

"Ah, could I hope so!" sighed Miss Nalders. "But you, at all events, shall have the thanks—how very poor the word sounds!—of a not ungrateful person—if—if—you will condescend to accept the offering."

"Should I have acquired any title to them," Brunton replied, "I am more than repaid by the acknowledgment; but," he added, "my satisfaction would be far greater if that acknowledgment were never renewed."

"I will speak no more, then," she said, "of what I can never forget!"

There was another pause of some moments, during which Miss Nalders sat with her head resting on her hand, and her eyes bent on the floor: it was again broken by Brunton, who began to entertain the misgiving that too much sentiment was mingled with the lady's gratitude.

"I am only half as fortunate this morning," said Brunton, "as I hoped to have been. Miss Temple Travers is from home?"

Margaret Nalders looked up, but it was plain to Brunton that, though his words had reached her ear, she had not caught their sense.

He repeated his question, omitting the complimentary introduction.

"Yes," replied Margaret, making an effort to collect her thoughts, "Alice has gone out with Mr. Travers. I believe they have driven to Highgate to call upon an old friend, Mrs. Hastings, whom Alice has not seen for some time. It would have given her the greatest pleasure to have seen you, for ever since that day—pardon me for again alluding to it—she has spoken of nothing but your——the event that then occurred."

"A proof," said Brunton, who appeared heroically resolved to put himself out of question—"a proof, if any were wanting, of the strength of her regard for you."

"It is true. Alice is the great exception. When with her, I feel I am not alone in the world. She loves

me with all her heart, and I—inefficiently, I fear—endeavour to deserve her affection. Dear Alice! I believe there is no sacrifice she would not make on my account, could I be so selfish as to require one. She has, all her life, been devoted to my slightest wish."

"Such an example is rare."

"It is, indeed. The tie, Mr. Brunton, that unites us is no common one. Placed by her side when I was myself little more than a child—her elder only by a few years"—(Miss Nalders omitted to say how many)—"there has only been that difference in our thoughts and feelings which arises from the procession of time, as between an elder sister and a younger. Scarcely so much, in fact, for the separations that occur in families have never divided us: from the hour she was first placed under my guidance 'we have lived and loved together.'"

"To part now," said Brunton, cautiously approaching the subject that was uppermost in his mind, "would be almost an impossibility."

"As you say, 'almost an impossibility.' And yet——"

A sigh filled up the unfinished sentence.

"'And yet,' Miss Nalders, if I may repeat your words also, whatever enters the imagination may come to pass at last."

"Do you think so? Oh, that is too great a latitude of belief."

"I mean within a reasonable limit."

"A reasonable limit may be one very difficult to define."

"It depends, of course, upon the mind of the thinker. With some, expectation is placed very high, others have views more moderate."

"Is it fair to ask you to which class you, yourself, belong?"

"I, Miss Nalders? To make true confession I reply that, like most men whose world is before them, I ha

aspirations with regard to certain aims which might be taxed with extravagance, if every day's experience did not show that most things are attainable. To persevere is to succeed."

"That creed would carry you very far."

"Not beyond the pale of reality."

"I must once more ask you for a definition."

"By 'reality,' then, I intend, the actual conditions of life: fortune and domestic happiness."

"How many thousands there are who achieve neither!"

"Because they neglect their opportunities."

"And these opportunities! Who knows, for certain, when they present themselves?"

"There is an instinctive faculty which warns us when the moment is arrived."

"I can understand that, so far as it relates to success in worldly affairs—in the pursuit of what you call 'fortune.' But the other condition, which seems to hold only the second place in your scale—is that also a waiter upon opportunity?"

"If I named it last, I did so because I prize it most—because it lingers latest in my thoughts. Without domestic happiness, fortune—so called—is valueless."

There was as much apparent sincerity in Brunton's words as if Claribel were not in existence, and the wealth of Miss Temple Travers merely a dream.

"Are you of opinion," said Margaret Nalders, who appeared unwilling to drop the theme, "that the two categories which you have named are indivisible?"

"By no means," replied Brunton. "There are a million instances to the contrary. A man may be rich and very wretched—happy but very poor. Oh, no! The division in this case is the rule. But there is no law against their co-existence. Sometimes it happens that they arrive together."

Brunton shot a hasty glance at Margaret Nalders, to ascertain the effect which these words produced.

"[illegible] not often," she said, calmly, "if I appre-

hend you rightly. But," she continued, with more animation, "it may very well be that one should follow the other. If a woman, for example, were devoted to a man whose fortune was yet to be made; if she knew, by something better than an instinctive faculty, that his love were equal to her own; if, in default of other means, she had the power of advancing his interests to almost any extent, of placing more than competence within his grasp; if, poor perhaps herself, her energies, her will, were equal to these issues, would not fortune in that way acquired be better welcomed than if it came by accident, or were only the consequence of successful calculation?"

A total change had in one moment been operated in e appearance of Margaret Nalders.

Youth she had not, neither—though very feminine of aspect—had beauty ever been her portion, but while she spoke, even after she had ceased speaking, she looked both young and beautiful, so wondrous is the charm that is wrought by love when passion, slumbering for years, is all at once aroused.

The conversation had throughout been impressed by Margaret Nalders with a character so peculiar, that, rapidly as her meaning was at last developed, it was not a surprise to Brunton. The only thing that startled him was the conversion of a manner so uniformly placid into one of such strong excitement. The change betokened danger to his hopes if the newly-awakened feeling were rudely thwarted.

"Il faut ménager cette femme!" was the idea that immediately crossed his mind, for Brunton could reason in any extremity.

Margaret Nalders had risen, and now stood clasping the table before her with both her trembling hands; she hastily turned her eyes on Brunton's, and then as hastily averted them; the blood which had rushed to her face ebbed as quickly as it mounted, and left her deadly pale.

Brunton advanced towards her.

"I will not," he said, in a low voice, "affect to misunderstand you. You offer me the life I saved."

She dropped into a chair, and covering her face, burst into an agony of tears.

Brunton took one of her hands.

"There is no cause for grief," he continued, in the same subdued tone. "Margaret!"

She started—her whole frame heaving with emotion.

"Margaret!" he whispered, "why did I save your life? If I had not loved you—the very instant I first beheld you—I might have left you to another."

"It is true, then, true, what I durst not hope," she exclaimed, "and no mere impulse of compassion! Will Alice believe in her own prediction? Oh, Richard! Richard!"

Did he dare, the dissembler, the double traitor, to press her to his bosom, to shower kisses on her brow, to utter the fondest words? Yes, he dared all, for he said within himself, "I will bend this nature to my own purpose. She loves me enough to be my slave."

And at once he made the first move in controlling her will.

"Margaret," he said, "but for that which has chanced —so happily—so unexpectedly—you would have learnt some of the particulars of my life when I spoke of acquiring fortune. It was my intention to have told you under what circumstances my career began, how far I am dependent, and how far free; but your own impulsive nature has caused you, in part, to anticipate an explanation which, when made, would have left my fate in your hands. Yes, such a wife as you described is necessary to my success; but that is not all. I am involved by considerations of vast weight in affairs of which I am not the absolute disposer, and our engagement—it *is* one, dearest?—must for the present remain a secret; a secret from all—even from your child and pupil, Alice Travers. Her assistance in carrying out our plans—*ours*, Margaret!—was that, I know, upon which you

reckoned, and it must not fail us. Win her regard for me; for your sake she will freely give it;—but until it is wholly won, breathe not a syllable of the reason why you plead. A premature disclosure would cause the failure of all my combinations. You promise this, Margaret?"

"Anything, everything, Richard, after what you have done for me!"

As Brunton passed through the old tesselated hall, his eye fell upon *The Queen of Sheba.*

"That ship," he muttered, "sailed on many a stormy sea, but she always got safely into port. My ventures are not less perilous than hers. Let me accept the omen. I will back myself against any one I know for improving an occasion."

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW SECRETS ARE DISCOVERED.

MRS. CUTTS was one of those ladies, of whom there are plenty, who are always secretly scheming. Her mind was wholly bent upon intrigue, her projects centred in nothing but self-interest, and she gave her confidence to none, though the apparent frankness of her manner led most people to suppose that she wore her heart upon her sleeve, for all the world's inspection.

A few, perhaps, knew her better—amongst them, Mr. Thomas Cutts, her husband—who had carefully studied human nature, and fancied himself "well up" in the study; for, let her openness seem what it might, he never came to the conclusion that he had got at the bottom of her thought: there was always, he felt, something more which he would fain have known, though he

was too discreet to ask her to tell it. It is very likely that he respected this reticence, having a spice of the same quality in his own disposition, but his ability to conceal was weaker than his wife's, and when it came to a trial of skill between them, the victory was invariably hers.

The design which Mrs. Cutts had formed for turning Lord Harry FitzLupus to account, was one of the schemes the execution of which she kept entirely to herself. To disguise from her husband the fact that she had a special object in inviting Lord Harry to meet her niece, was, of course, out of the question; she even went so far as to admit—when he, very naturally, broached the subject—that she had "Claribel's good at heart," but further than this she was not disposed to speak, and in what particular way she proposed to carry out her maternal purpose she left him to guess as well as he was able. She quietly requested him not to interfere, and there, so far as he was concerned, the matter rested.

Left to herself, as she had determined to be, Mrs. Cutts pursued her own course.

"Claribel's good" was still the watchword when she took her niece away from Brompton and carried her alone to Mayfair, as she now frequently did, to pass the evening. Mrs. Basset was too dependent on her richer and more active-minded sister to question anything the latter might be disposed to do, had Mrs. Cutts been altogether silent as to her intentions; but believing it *was* for the good of Claribel—and she had only one way of interpreting that—she acceded willingly to her sister's arrangements. The splendour of a high marriage, though nothing but sorrow and mortification had ever come of such to Claribel's mother, was always present to Mrs. Basset's imagination, and the prospect of seeing her niece a great lady, and imparting great-ladyism to herself, filled her with the greatest satisfaction.

Claribel, poor thing, content to be what circumstances had made her, indulged in none of these ambitious

dreams, but was perfectly obedient to the wishes of both her aunts. Not, however, in utter passiveness, for the pleasurable feeling which she experienced when first she made the acquaintance of Lord Harry FitzLupus had gradually become a sentiment of almost sisterly regard, while on his part the regard considerably exceeded that of a brother.

But Lord Harry's pleasure in these *réunions* was not altogether without its alloy. For some private reason, which a woman may divine where a man's wit fails, Mrs. Cutts put herself more forward on these occasions than was quite agreeable to the noble lord, who would gladly have dispensed with the attentions which she so profusely heaped upon him. He scarcely knew what to make of an *empressement* from which there was no escape, and hardly an interval of relaxation. It is true he both saw and conversed with Claribel, but he saw her always in the presence of Mrs. Cutts, and his conversations were never uninterrupted, a *tête-à-tête* for five minutes seeming impossible. Nevertheless, Lord Harry was thankful for these glimpses of Elysium, and treasured in his heart every casual glance of Claribel's, every word that fell from her lips.

Such was the state of affairs under the auspices of Mrs. Cutts, when upon one of the occasions of her calling at Brompton to take Claribel home, her quick eye made a discovery which gave her anything but pleasure.

It was Richard Brunton's card, stuck under the frame of the pier-glass, and doubly conspicuous there, from being alone in its glory.

"I see, Harriet," said Mrs. Cutts, "that you have had a visitor;" and, as she spoke, she nodded at the glass.

"Oh yes, Kate," replied Mrs. Basset, taking down the card. "It was Mr. Brunton, one of the gentlemen we saw at your house. I can't tell what made him call, for he never spoke to either me or Clary, but sat staring in a corner all the evening."

"Were you at home when he came?"

"Oh dear no! It was yesterday, when me and Clary had gone to the Doctor's; we didn't get home till dark. But John saw him, and he tells me they had a good deal of talk together, and that he is a very pleasant kind of man."

"Oh, John saw him! What did they talk about?"

"I'm sure I can't tell you, Kate. But here he is himself. Ask him."

The little silversmith had come up "just to say a word"—about nothing at all—but he had a good many words to say before the interrogation to which he was submitted by Mrs. Cutts was over.

The faculty of memory exhibits itself in various ways. With one person it is local, with another incidental; some remember dates, some names, some faces, some every detail of the most trifling conversation.

The memory of Mr. Basset was of the last-named description. He had a genius for recollecting what everybody said to him and what he said in reply;—and the less important the matter, the more accurate his recollection.

Consequently he was able to relate every syllable that passed between Brunton and himself, and he dwelt with so much pride on the fact that the gentleman had mentioned his wife with "respect" and Claribel's talents with "admiration," that tears of pleasure came into his eyes as he repeated the words.

It was as well that there were tears to obstruct his vision, for he would have felt no pleasure had he noticed the expression on his sister-in-law's countenance.

"Oaf!" she muttered, when he had done. "To tell all this to a stranger! Bad enough at any time, but with such a man as Brunton! He has some motive for calling here. I must find it out."

On the way home Mrs. Cutts reverted to this unexpected visit.

"I wish, Clary," she said, "that some one would try

and break your uncle of that foolish habit he has of gossiping with every one he sees. Mr. Brunton happens to be a friend of Tom's, but that was no reason for telling him all one's affairs. For my part, I'm not particularly fond of Mr. Brunton."

"Neither am I, aunt," replied Claribel, quietly.

"You! Clary! Why, what do you know about him?"

"Very little; but that little has not impressed me in his favour."

"You don't like his looks?"

"I like his words less."

"His words! Why, Harriet said just now he had never spoken to you!"

"Not at your house."

"Where, then? Have you seen him anywhere else?"

"Yes, aunt. He comes very often to the theatre, and the last time I played *Rosalind* he was in the green-room."

"Who took him there?"

Claribel hesitated for a moment, and then named Mr. Cutts.

"Cutts took him, did he? Oh! And what did Mr. Brunton say that caused you to dislike him?"

"It was great folly—and great impertinence," replied Claribel, the colour rising to her cheek as it had done on the night when the call-boy suddenly summoned her while Brunton was speaking.

"He made love to you, I suppose?" said Mrs. Cutts.

"Be so good, aunt, not to speak any more on the subject," replied Claribel.

"You are quite right, Clary. The man is not worth thinking of!"

But if Claribel dismissed Brunton from her thoughts, Mrs. Cutts did not. There was something going on between her husband and his newly-revived friend which she was resolved to fathom.

She could make no progress towards discovery that

night, for Mr. Cutts, who had never been a very domestic man, was less so now than ever. Since he had begun to prosper in Mayfair, he could boast of a more numerous acquaintance than formerly, though indeed there were very few amongst them about whom he would have been justified in boasting, if the phrase had been taken *au pied de la lettre*. They principally belonged to what is termed "the betting circles," which include both high and low; the very flashy turfite at Hyde Park-corner, and the less flashy but quite as turfy gentleman who operates at the other corner of Piccadilly, and whose Tattersall's is the pavement in front of Lemon Tree-yard. It is even possible that amongst the intimates of Mr. Cutts were more than one of those benevolent parties who so disinterestedly seize the earliest moment to apprise their sporting friends that, through the kindness of a nobleman, who knows all about it, they are prepared to back the absolute winner, and strongly advise their friends aforesaid to invest liberally, having only their benefit in view; on which account they request that orders may be made payable to Henry Howard or Charles Plantagenet, Post-office, Blank-street, though they intimate at the same time that bank-notes may be sent by letter with perfect security. But whatever the nocturnal attraction, Mr. Cutts generally stayed out very late, and if the truth must be told, the privation to his amiable helpmate was not very severe. When she wanted Mr. Cutts to stay at home, she had only to say the word; but as this was not often the case, she very seldom said it.

The proverb tells us that "with the day comes opportunity."

Mrs. Cutts made her opportunity by day or night, according as it happened; though she preferred the breakfast hour for putting anything straight that might have gone awry. A man's conscience is more assailable over the morning cup of tea than over the evening glass of port. Not that she ever appealed to the conscience of

Mr. Cutts—she knew him too well for that—but at the time she usually selected she got at her object easier, perhaps for the reason that if he had done anything amiss the recollection of it was too fresh to admit of unhesitating denial.

To accuse Mr. Cutts was not, however, any part of her intention on the present occasion. What she wanted to learn she meant to worm out of him.

In an easy, indifferent way, she accordingly began:

"Where did you dine yesterday, Tom?" she asked.

"At Greenwich, Kate," he replied.

"A party?"

"Only a few fellows. Six or eight of us."

"Who were they, Tom?"

"Oh, none that you know, Kate."

"What, none?"

"Stay—yes—now I come to think of it, there was Brunton."

"You see him so often, I suppose, that he counts for nobody?"

"Who, I? I don't see him near so often as I used—not by a mile of chalks."

"You dined with him the other day?"

"Yes, at the Wellington. He wanted to try the house."

"Isn't he coming out more than he did?"

"I can't say, really."

"Well, but he's making money."

"Oh, there's no doubt of that, I fancy."

"The next we hear of him very likely will be that he's going to be married!"

"You women are always thinking about marriage."

"Not more than you men, Tom."

"Ah, but Brunton's not a marrying man."

"What makes you suppose that?"

"It's a subject he never mentions."

"The more likely to be in his thoughts. One of the Ashleys, now, would be a good match for him. They are all nice girls, and will have good fortunes."

next Derby; now, he would have knocked the man down who dared to hint that such a thing was possible.

His present position with regard to the beautiful girl, estimating it by what he felt, was at once romantic and delightful, but then it was beset by difficulties.

In the first place, supposing he entertained the thought of throwing up his chance of the heiress and her fortune and making Claribel his wife: he married a charming girl without a penny!

Next, how was he to repay the money he had borrowed—chiefly in the hope of succeeding with Miss Travers, yet, to a certain extent, on the expectation of inheriting the property of his aunt, Lady Sheepskin, who could have seen him play the knave with the greatest complacency, but would never have pardoned him for playing the fool.

And lastly, if he made this marriage, there was the certainty of being cut off by his noble father, the Marquis of Wolverton, who had the greatest horror of a *mésalliance*: a horror not entertained without reason, if what some people said were true, though the story had long been hushed up, and was almost universally forgotten.

For one whose conduct in life had never been regulated by any strong principle, and who was only prevented from going wrong by an instinctive dislike to what he thought a dirty action, the position in which Lord Harry found himself was, unquestionably, a dilemma.

He stood in need of advice, but whom should he consult?

He ran over the list of his most intimate friends—Lord Dangerfield's set—but he had already taken counsel there. It was in solemn conclave with them that he had decided on "putting up" for Miss Travers, as if she had been Lord Dangerfield's pocket borough. To announce a change in his intentions would not only expose him to the ridicule of the whole party, but raise amongst them —especially with his dear chum Crooky—the serious

question of a settlement of accounts, the "mauvais quart d'heure" of Rabelais in its most disagreeable form. He had gone so far in the affair, by borrowing money on the implied understanding with Mr. Coates Taylor that he was to repay him when he married the wealthy heiress, that to declare off without a distinct proposal and its decided rejection, would at once convert that gentleman, now his friend, into a disagreeably importunate creditor. And there was more in the background, where the bills which he had given to Mr. Ashley loomed largely, and unless it pleased the Fates very speedily to cut the thread of Lady Sheepskin's life, those bills must be renewed, every renewal, as he was aware by sad experience, involving him in deeper obligations.

Again, then, Lord Harry asked himself, what was to be done?

He was occupied with these cogitations at breakfast on the morning of the *tête à-tête* described at the close of the last chapter, when his valet entered with a note which seemed to have been steeped in *patchouli*. A page, the valet said, had brought it, and waited for an answer.

I am, myself, so far an adherent to the doctrine of magnetism, as to believe that people very frequently have certain sympathetic relations with each other which do not very readily admit of explanation. The fact, as between debtor and creditor, is very easily understood; nor is it very hard to conceive how those who mutually hate or mutually love should have thoughts in common, occurring, too, at the same moment of time. But the association I speak of is that which brings to one person's mind the recollection of another, ordinarily indifferent to him, who is just then preparing to enter into some matter of interest to them both.

Of all the persons likely to be serviceable to Lord Harry FitzLupus in helping him out of his difficulties, the last he should have dreamt of was Mrs. Cutts, and yet her image had arisen unbidden to his memory as soon as he woke that day; and this, most probably,

had happened at the very time when she sat down to indite the missive that smelt so powerfully of *patchouli*.

Lord Harry took the note, but before he opened it he asked his valet, Pollard, where it came from?

Mr. Pollard, who was rather a fine gentleman, and apt to be oblivious of names which were not to his thinking sufficiently aristocratic, replied:

"From a lady named Cats, my lord; Cats, I think!"

"Ca-ats?" said Lord Harry, slowly. "There are several old ca-ats of my acquaintance, but they don't admit it themselves; neither am I in correspondence with any of them—excepting one; yes, I must except one."

With this irreverent allusion to Lady Sheepskin, he tore off the perfumed envelope, read the contents with a puzzled air, and then dismissed his valet, telling him he would send an answer presently.

As soon as Mr. Pollard was gone, Lord Harry read the note again.

"So!" he said. "From Mrs. Cutts! Odd enough that I should have been thinking of her just now! What does she say? Her style is peculiar."

This time we will accompany Lord Harry as he reads.

"Mrs. Cutts craves your lordship's *kind indulgence* in addressing Lord Harry FitzLupus, but *circumstances*, which I trust may be held *religiously sacred*, *induces* her to trouble your lordship with *this request*. Mr. Cutts *being from home* to-day *at the races*, is the *reason* for her asking the pleasure of the honour of a *private interview* with his lordship at my house in Mayfair, *as early as may be convenient*, and remain, *most* gratefully, your lordship's humble servant,

"CATHERINE CUTTS.

"P.S. At home from eleven till two."

"I wonder what it all means?" said Lord Harry, when he had gone through the epistle for the third time. "At all events, I must comply with the lady's request."

Three lines sufficed to say he would present himself in Mayfair within an hour, and he was punctual to the time appointed.

He found Mrs. Cutts alone in the drawing-room where he had first been introduced to her, ornate and gay as Samson's faithless spouse. She was beflounced and bedizened as if she were going to a series of evening parties: it is the *parvenue's* custom to wear all her wardrobe at once!

Lord Harry asked himself if this array meant conquest, the lady being dressed with so much design, and smiling with so much meaning.

Yet she spoke, as it seemed, with a timidity very foreign to her usual manner.

"I don't know how to forgive myself," she began, "for having taken so great a liberty as to write to your lordship——"

"You did me infinite honour," interrupted Lord Harry. "I shall be only too happy to know that I can render you the slightest service."

"I am so afraid," she went on, "that your lordship should put a wrong construction on my note. But when I mentioned the fact of Mr. Cutts having gone to the races, I merely intended to say that an opportunity had occurred which—which—I had been hoping for, some time, to—to—communicate something—that is, to tell your lordship; really, I feel so embarrassed—I—I——"

And Mrs. Cutts cast down her very fine eyes, the picture of ladylike confusion—a little overdone.

Lord Harry—who might be excused if he interpreted Mrs. Cutts's hesitation according to his first impression, there being, as he supposed, but one clue to this kind of mystery—began to feel almost as uncomfortable as the lady herself appeared: to be made love to by Mrs. Cutts had

not been included by him in the programme of his affairs. He, however, remained silent, resolved to say nothing in aid of the dreaded demonstration. The proceeding was unnecessary. for Mrs. Cutts, finding she was not to have his assistance, recovered herself without much—it may be said without any—difficulty.

"Every family, my lord," she continued, "has something to trouble it. We have our annoyances as well as other people. Not that I complain of Cutts the least in the world; far from it; domestically speaking, Tom is the best creature in the world."

Lord Harry breathed again. This was not the tone of a Zuleika.

"I always supposed so," he observed.

"And you were right, my lord. Perfidy to the wife of his bosom is not one of his faults. Still, he is not perfect."

Lord Harry might have repeated his supposition, but he only bowed.

"In making that remark," pursued Mrs. Cutts, "I allude to other intimacies. Cutts sees a good deal of different kinds of society, and sometimes chooses his friends in strange places."

"What the deuce do I care about the fellow!" thought Lord Harry, still silent, but looking as if he expected to hear something more.

"Mrs. Cutts interpreted his look rightly, and went at once to the point.

"In what concerns himself alone, my husband does what he pleases; I have nothing to say to that; but when others are compromised by his proceedings it is quite time to put a stop to them."

"Do I know anyone who is affected by them?" asked Lord Harry.

"You do, my lord. When I mention the name of my niece——"

"Miss Page!" exclaimed Lord Harry, in astonishment.

"Yes, my lord, Miss Page. I am very uneasy about her."

"Good God! On what account?"

"It is so purely a domestic matter," said Mrs. Cutts, with affected hesitation, "that, although I had made up my mind to enter into the subject, I do *not* think I ought to mention it."

"Whatever relates to Miss Page," said Lord Harry, earnestly, "must always deeply interest me—everybody who has the happiness of knowing her."

A gleam of triumph danced in the fine eyes which so lately had been cast down.

"That was my idea, my lord, when I wrote to your lordship. I wished very much to ask your opinion about this business."

"Pray tell me to what you refer. Does Miss Page intend to—to quit her new profession?"

Mrs. Cutts would not reply to the question directly, though she very well knew what Lord Harry was on the point of saying.

"I am naturally anxious about poor Claribel," she replied. "So young and so beautiful—I believe I may say *that*—she is, of course, dreadfully exposed—in her profession above all others. Men *will* admire young persons who are on the stage, if they have the slightest pretensions to beauty. And then they are, in a manner, entirely unprotected, left completely—or at least so much to themselves, that it is hardly to be wondered at if—what shall I call them—overtures—are sometimes made. Now I can place the greatest reliance on Claribel, but I am unable to disguise from myself the fact that she——"

The habits of life of Lord Harry FitzLupus had made him as impassive as most of his class: he could lose his money or his friend with an unaltered countenance, or stand up to be shot at with an even pulse, but—so much empire had Claribel acquired over him—he could not hear her name unmoved.

"Do I understand," he interrupted, "that any one has dared to insult Miss Page?"

"Oh no, no, my lord," returned Mrs. Cutts, hastily; "what I intended to add was, that Claribel is liable to the same thing. I have no reason for believing that anything actually improper has ever been addressed to her—only in the mouths of some people words have such different meanings."

"And you," said Lord Harry, seriously, "mean more than you say, although you led me to suppose I was about to be honoured by your confidence. Will you be kind enough to speak to me, frankly, as to a friend?"

"My lord," replied Mrs. Cutts, with apparent *abandon*, "I *will* speak frankly since you encourage me to do so. You may remember that I made allusion to some of my husband's acquaintance?"

"Perfectly—but without specifying them;—only in a general way."

"Just so. I mentioned no names. But to make myself understood I must do so. I don't believe there is a better-hearted person in the world than my husband—indeed, his greatest fault is being too kind—he can't say 'No.' When once he has rendered a service to anybody he seems to think he must go on repeating it for ever. Now, when Cutts was in the army, he befriended a young man of the name of Brunton, who stood in need of assistance. Of course he professed himself very grateful, and there was an end of the matter. Well, after that, my husband lost sight of the young man for some time, but at last he heard of him again—he wrote, in fact, saying he was in great distress: that was about two or three years ago. When people are in want, Cutts never can keep his hand out of his pocket, so he found Mr. Brunton out in a poor, miserable little hole of a lodging, gave him what he asked for, and literally set him on his legs again. I must tell you the truth, my lord; I never liked this young man. There was always a something about him that seemed hollow and

false, and not to be depended on, and I couldn't held saying to my husband once, 'take care Tom, you're not warming a snake in your bosom to turn round and sting you some day!' But I was only laughed at. Well, my lord, this Mr. Brunton is now a very thriving man, a rich one, I hear—how he became so I know no more than you—and if it hadn't been for an accident Tom and he might never have met again, for Cutts is much too high spirited to look after people because they've got money—but, as I said, they met and renewed their acquaintance, and Tom asked him to come and see us. He was here, my lord, the first night you did us the honour."

"Indeed!" said Lord Harry, musing; "I have no recollection of him."

"Perhaps not, my lord, but such is the case. Now, since that evening, it has come to my knowledge that Mr. Brunton has been practising the greatest deception. How he persuaded my husband to take him to Mr. Wimple's green-room and introduce him to Claribel"—(Lord Harry started)—"in such a place and unknown to me, can only be accounted for by Cutts's extreme good nature, and that simplicity of his which leads him to suspect no one. If Cutts had considered for a moment—and he was very, very wrong not to have done so—he would have asked himself why Mr. Brunton did not come to *me* for an introduction if he wished for one, and as he might have done when he was in my house. Cutts ought to have seen there was something underhanded in going to him in that way, but he didn't—the more's the pity! Ungentlemanlike as the proceeding was, if it had stopped there I could have forgiven it; but no sooner was Brunton introduced than he took advantage of my husband's back being turned to make the—the overtures I alluded to."

"Insolent scoundrel!" muttered Lord Harry, quivering with rage.

"What I complain of, my Lord," continued Mrs.

Cutts, not appearing to notice the effect which her communication had produced—"what I complain of is the clandestine way in which the thing was done. If Mr. Brunton had gone honourably to work and asked my sister or me to favour his proposals, why neither of us would have stood in the way of Claribel's marriage, if she had wished it, though I know nothing of Mr. Brunton, and Claribel's father, my lord, though poor, was a gentleman—of high family. But here the case was altogether different. It was, as you said, my lord, an insult—in a certain sense, whatever he may have intended—and it is on account of that insult I am now so unhappy."

Mrs. Cutts raised her handkerchief to her face, and exhibited signs of strong emotion.

"If," she resumed, making a strong effort—"if the occurrence had been named to my husband, I know what would have been the upshot. In spite of his good nature, he is the most fiery creature in the world where his honour is concerned. A military man, my lord, takes only one view of such a question, and though Cutts has left the army some years, I still call him a military man. Duelling is out of fashion, but there must have been a duel in this case—there may be one still, should Mr Brunton's conduct ever reach my husband's ears—and what would be my condition if Tom should fall! Oh, my lord, pray forgive me—forgive the anxiety of a wretched aunt—but what *is* to be done?"

Once more Mrs. Cutts buried her face in her *mouchoir* and sobbed audibly.

Lord Harry FitzLupus rose and paced up and down the room; he knit his brow, and clenched his hands, but did not speak. Either he had not a suggestive genius, or was afraid of saying too much. Mrs. Cutts looked from under her handkerchief, and saw him seat himself again.

"There is only one course to be taken," she said, with an air of a person who had come to a conclusion

long debated—"I must make up my mind to the sacrifice and forego all the hopes I entertained from Claribel's undoubted talents. What has happened once may occur again. There are plenty Bruntons in the world, and he, too, remains. Claribel must give up the stage—leave London—leave England altogether. Dr. Brocas has long urged me to allow her to do so—he wishes to adopt her as his daughter and take her to Italy—there she will be free from molestation—at the cost, perhaps, of fame and—for aught I know—happiness with some one who, even here, might have learnt to appreciate her rare qualities. But this is a subject of too much delicacy for me to dwell on. All that I desired to ask your lordship—for I have been carried much further than I intended—was the favour of your opinion."

"My opinion!" cried Lord Harry, giving vent all at once to the passion that had been working within him—"my opinion is that Claribel is an angel!"

"My lord! Lord Harry FitzLupus!" exclaimed Mrs. Cutts, rising with well-affected astonishment.

"It's of no use to conceal the fact any longer," he rejoined, "but I love your niece to desperation!"

"You, too! Oh for shame, for shame, my lord. I am her nearest relative."

"It is—as such—" stammered Lord Harry, impelled to a declaration—"that I say what I do say. If Claribel will have me, I'll marry her to-morrow!"

"Lord Harry! I am overpowered! That dear child! Oh, my feelings!"

Mrs. Cutts sank down upon a sofa, and for just ten seconds her spirit seemed to have winged itself to a purer sphere. Recovering, however, she said, in a faint voice,

"It is too much! The surprise overwhelms me! So far beyond every expectation!"

"You consent, then," said Lord Harry, with more energy than sentiment—"you consent, then, to back me up with Claribel?"

"Depend upon me," returned Mrs. Cutts, giving him her hand, all signs of languor gone.

"And she hates that fellow?"

"Hates him? I believe you!"

Lord Harry was too far gone to take exception to the language in which the exulting Mrs. Cutts expressed herself.

"When," he asked, "can I see Claribel, to make my own proposal?"

"To-morrow, I trust, at the latest! But you shall hear from me this evening."

"Good-by, then, my dearest Mrs. Cutts!"

"Good-by, my dearest Lord Harry."

Mrs. Cutts watched him from the balcony till he turned the corner of the street.

"Easier than I expected!" she said. "But I was obliged to give Cutts a good character. He shall know nothing of this move, though, till the game is fairly won. I must first of all break it to Claribel. What luck!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

AGAIN A DECLARATION.

RICHARD BRUNTON lost no time in communicating to Mr. Ashley the result of his visit to Mr. Velters, but all that had taken place afterwards he carefully locked in his own bosom.

The Hebrew Dealer was well pleased with what he heard, and Brunton, observing his genial mood, thought the occasion favourable for asking him to fulfil the promise he had made of introducing him to Dr. Brocas.

Mr. Ashley assented very readily to Brunton's request, having several newly-imported *objets* which he wished

to show, and they at once drove off together in Brunton's brougham.

Their discourse on the road to Vallombrosa turned chiefly on the character of the person whom they were about to visit, and the Hebrew Dealer was eloquent in praise of the learned civilian, whose exquisite taste, accurate knowledge, and polished manners, had quite fascinated him; so completely, indeed, that he had not yet thought of asking him for money, but parted with his goods without a word.

"Good morning, ma'am," said Mr. Ashley to Dr. Brocas's housekeeper, Mrs. Turner, who was the first person he saw when Brunton and himself were shown in at the Fulham Cottage. "I have kept my promise with the Doctor, and brought him something he will be delighted with."

"I hope," replied Mrs. Turner, smiling, "that your expectations may be realised Be kind enough to wait a few moments. I will mention that you are here."

She left the room and shortly returned—still smiling—with the intimation that Dr. Brocas, who was in his study, would receive the gentleman there.

They accordingly followed her thither, and Brunton was rather surprised, as they drew near, to hear a fine manly voice issuing through the half-open door, and indulging, to the full extent of its range, in the following strophe:

"Tôt, tôt, tôt,
Maréchaux,
Battez chaud!
Battez chaud—battez fort—bon coura-ge!
Il faut avoir cœur à l'ouvra-ge!
Gi!"

"Who on earth can that be?" whispered Brunton to his companion.

The Hebrew Dealer shrugged his shoulders, and Mrs. Turner, who had heard the question, laughed outright.

She tapped at the study door: the song ceased, and the voice, deep, guttural, and *grasseyant*, as if it were gurgling with the letter "r," called out: "Entr-r-rez!"

The impression which Dr. Brocas had left on the mind of Brunton, who had only seen him once, was that of a dignified elderly gentleman, lofty but *suave*, a combination of the courtier, the judge, and the ecclesiastic.

Could the man he now saw be the same person?

The features were there, but the impression was entirely changed. Its refinement and thoughtful gravity were superseded by a look of careless mirth, such as suits the light-hearted French artisan who toils for his bread and gains it day by day, jovial yet philosophical.

His attire was as French as his manner.

His venerable temples were crowned by a blue and white striped cotton nightcap, the tassel of which fell jauntily over his left ear; his shirt-sleeves were tucked up above his elbows: trousers of blue linen adorned his nether man; instead of braces a gay *foulard* was knotted round his waist; and on his feet were gaudy carpet slippers: to make the resemblance more complete, he wore a pair of small, gold earrings.

The occupation of Dr. Brocas was in keeping with his costume.

He was seated at a long, narrow, deal table, covered with chisels, drills, and other tools, and was busily employed with a lathe in turning some kind of hard wood —and as he worked he sang.

The place was a workshop for the moment, but in all other respects it deserved the name of a study, being well stored as a library.

Dr. Brocas raised his head as Mr. Ashley and Brunton entered.

"Ah! comment ça-va?" he said, nodding to the former. "Il faut avoir cœur à l'ouvra-ge!"

"I hope we don't interrupt you, sir," said Mr. Ashley, who could scarcely preserve his habitual command of countenance at beholding the travesty of Dr. Brocas.

"I have taken the liberty of bringing a friend with me to-day, who has a nice feeling for Art, and wishes much to see your collection, sir."

"Hein?" said Dr. Brocas, with the *air hébêté* of a man who did not comprehend.

The Hebrew Dealer repeated his words.

"Qu'il soit le bienvenu!" was the reply.

Doctor Brocas plied his chisel briskly for several minutes; then, looking up again and addressing Brunton, he said,

"Faut, travailler, monsieur, pour gagner son argent. La vie est dure—allez!"

As Brunton was a good French scholar, it cost him nothing to reply in the same language: he was amused, and wished, moreover, to conciliate the learned civilian.

"Vous avez raison," he said. "Combien gagnez-vous par jour?"

"Ça dépend, monsieur," returned Dr. Brocas, as seriously as if he were the workman whom he chose to personate—"ça dépend du commerce. Quand l'ouvrage va vîte on peut bien remplir ses poches; mais s'il n'y en a pas, ou fort peu, nous voilà enfoncés! C'que je gagne? Dame! Je ne saurais vous dire au juste. Du pain, aujourd'hui; demain, rien! C'est comme ça."

"Vous avez là un beau métier!" said Brunton.

"Croyez-vous?" demanded the pseudo-artisan.

"Mais, certainement: le travail, aussi, est beau!"

"Il n'est pas vilain, allez!"

"Quel âge avez-vous?"

"J'ai soixante ans, monsieur, bien sonnés."

"Etes-vous marié?"

"Non pas, monsieur. Dieu merci! Si j'avais une femme j'aurais des chagrins!"

"Et vous n'en avez pas?"

"Monsieur," said Dr. Brocas, desisting from his work, but holding his instrument ready, "je vous ferai une observation. Il n'y a pas d'homme sur la terre qui ne

soit quelquefois contrarié. Mais qu'est ce que ça fait, monsieur? Faut prendre le temps comme il vient!"

"Vous parlez, mon ami, en vrai philosophe."

"Je fais ce que je peux, monsieur. On n'est ni ange ni bête; on est homme."

And, humming the *refrain* of his song, he resumed his task, drilling, and gouging, and chiselling, as if his existence had depended on the issue.

On a sudden he threw down his tools and burst into a fit of laughter.

"Poor Mr. Ashley!" he exclaimed. "He seems thoroughly mystified. I like you, sir," he added, speaking to Brunton—"you suit my humour. What is your name?"

Brunton gave it.

"And you are fond of Art? Well, I can show you a few things. Not like our friend here, though. He lives in an ever-changing museum. Something new to-day, Mr. Ashley? Mediæval work? Good! Now, gentlemen, if you walk into the drawing-room I will be with you in five minutes."

He joined them, in fact, almost immediately, having only taken the time necessary for putting on a large, loose *robe de chambre*, which made him appear himself again.

Mr. Ashley produced the curiosities he had brought, but Dr. Brocas set the case on one side unopened.

"After all," he said, "what is the value of Art, except in relation to those faculties by whose exercise labour and ingenuity obtain their daily bread! Who works for anything else, or who would work a single hour, if he did not expect to fill his belly when his task was ended? Art is only subsidiary to existence, eating and drinking are its prime necessities. Take me into the Vatican, lead me to the Florentine Gallery; will the Last Judgment or the Transfiguration, the Apollo or the Venus, supply the place of a hearty meal? Your enthusiastic people swear they could dwell for ever before

the masterpieces of Raffaelle and Michael Angelo. Shut them up in the Sistine Chapel for six hours—no longer—let them hear the clatter of knives and forks, let them smell the Pope's dinner—*glorious stews with onions!*—and see how long they will remain indifferent to the clamour of appetite! If they could only get at their food by forcing their way through the palace walls, the frescoes would be shivered to atoms, the canvas torn to shreds. A pork chop—*nicely browned*—to a man who has fasted for twelve hours, is better to him than all the pictures and sculptures in the world. Esau knew what he was about when he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, and Jacob, the ingenious Jacob, would never have gained his object without the savoury meat which his father's soul loved."

Mr. Ashley seemed rather uneasy at this *tirade*, but Brunton observed:

"Nobody, my dear sir, will attempt to dispute one part of your proposition, that we must eat to live; but does not your own example prove that you have lived for something better than eating?"

"My example proves nothing. I went astray from the right path and have found my way back again. Look at the multitude—the great mass of mankind? Is there anything better in their eyes than *beans and bacon?* And does not every day's experience tell us—is it not a received axiom—that the majority are always right? Talk of your golden dishes and salvers, your gemmed goblets and jewelled *tazze*, your John of Bologna and your Benvenuto Cellini! What are they all in comparison with a plate of *boiled beef and cabbage, swimming in gravy;—with a pot of foaming porter to wash them well down!*"

Brunton could not refrain from laughing, but the Hebrew Dealer still looked grave: he began to think that the learned civilian was a little cracked, and for the first time a vision of bills unpaid floated before his eyes.

Dr. Brocas eyed him with a look of intense satisfac-

tion. The more serious a man's pursuits—and what pursuit so serious as the quest after money? — the more he delighted to perplex and disturb him: like a Will-o'-the-Wisp, his great delight appeared to be to lead people wrong.

But he was never very long in one mood; his jests were generally short-lived; he was too eager to laugh at the credulity of those whom he had taken in to keep them in lingering suspense.

"And so you really suppose, Mr. Ashley, that I am fond of carpentering and gormandising! A mechanical occupation and the instincts of the brute! Ha! ha! ha! I have not had the pleasure of knowing you very long, but I fancied you too shrewd to be done by artifices so shallow! But what are the wisest among us? Is there a wise man on earth?"

He rose from his chair as he spoke, and marched across the room, pausing after every step, as he recited the well-known lines from his favourite Boileau:

> De tous les animaux qui s'élèvent dans l'air,
> Qui marchent sur la terre, ou nagent dans la mer,
> De Paris au Pérou, du Japon jusqu'à Rome,
> Le plus sot animal, à mon avis, c'est l'homme.

"And now to exemplify my own folly. Open your case, Mr. Ashley, and bewilder me with its contents! You will very soon find that I am as great a fool as the rest."

Dr. Brocas sat down and drew near the table, but before he could satisfy the curiosity which was now uppermost in him, some visitors were announced.

They proved to be Mrs. Basset and Claribel.

The latter started on seeing Brunton, and he turned pale.

"Ah," said Dr. Brocas, rising and taking Claribel's hand, "I am glad you are come! But you ought to have been here before. We have had such fun! These gentlemen are Mr. Ashley, whom you have met before,

ınd Mr. Brunton, a great lover of Art, whom I beg to ›resent to you. Now, come and see what I have got ıere. But what is the matter, moppet—you don't look vell?"

"Oh yes, sir," replied Claribel, "I am very well; at east I was so a minute ago. A sudden faintness, nothing more."

"A glass of water, somebody!" cried Dr. Brocas.

Brunton poured out a glass from a *carafe* that stood ›n the table, and hastened to offer it. Claribel drew ›ack, declaring that she was better already.

"Something in the room, I dare say," said Dr. Brocas, ooking round. "Ah! the villainous *pot-pourri*, no loubt, which that idiotic Turnerini *would* fill the large china ›ase with. I detest that kind of perfume! I detest all ›erfumes! Go into the garden, child. The fresh air ınd the flowers will do you good. Mrs. Basset, I can't ›pare *you*. Here are the spoons that Julius Cæsar used ›o stir his tea with, and the sugar tongs of Alexander ›he Great! The greatest curiosities that ever were ›een!"

"Lor!" exclaimed the wondering Mrs. Basset. "You ›on't say so, Doctor! Well, I never!"

It seemed to be the greatest relief to Claribel to escape from the room. She waved her hand to Dr. Brocas as he led her aunt away, and went out at one of the open French windows. Brunton's eye was fixed upon her, but she never turned her face towards him.

Mr. Ashley now displayed his treasures, which were well worth a connoisseur's notice. Dr. Brocas was charmed with them, but he was charmed still more with Mrs. Basset's ignorance. There were certain persons who invariably awoke the mocking vein that ran like an under current through his nature, and Mrs. Basset was one of these. He explained the carvings and reliefs on the weapons and ornaments that were spread before him in a hundred ridiculous ways, invented the most incredible stories about their uses and ownership, and

finally became so absorbed in the process of mystification that the absence of Brunton, who stole away as soon as he saw that Dr. Bocas was fairly engrossed by his subject, was quite unperceived by him.

Through the same window as that by which Claribel had disappeared, Brunton followed. He looked round eagerly, but she was nowhere to be seen. The garden was very picturesquely laid out, the foreground being filled with beds of beautiful flowers, which were scattered over the lawn; groups of young and graceful shrubs occupied the middle distance, allowing glimpses of the Thames to be seen between, and masses of towering trees enclosed the whole. From a terrace beneath the drawing-room windows various paths diverged. Uncertain which to take, Brunton chose one that kept him out of view should Dr. Brocas chance to turn his head. He was not long in sight from any point, for he walked quickly, straining his eyes to discover the object he was in search of. He left his original track more than once, and crossed it several times, but still without success. At last he approached the river side of the garden and was impatiently cursing his ill-luck, when, at a sudden turn of the path, the flutter of a white dress caught his attention, and he saw Claribel advancing towards him, and only a few paces distant. She also saw him at the same moment, and made a gesture as if to retrace her steps, but she changed her mind and moved quietly forward.

Brunton had observed the movement and noticed her heightened colour; two steps more on each side and they were close together.

Brunton took off his hat and spoke.

"I fear, Miss Page," he said, "that I have offended you. You try to avoid me!"

"You will permit me to pass, sir," returned Claribel, without vouchsafing any other answer.

"Not till you have explained to me," said Brunton, "the reason of your indifference, your coldness, your manifest dislike."

"Such explanations," replied Claribel, with *hauteur*, are not due to strangers."

"But I am none, Miss Page. I am your uncle's intimate friend!"

"It may be, sir; but that makes you no less a stranger to me."

"You forget that I have enjoyed your society on two different occasions."

"I remember that the only time when a conversation was possible, you forgot the respect which every gentleman is bound to show to every woman!"

"How can you misconceive me so, Miss Page! There is no one breathing for whom my respect is so profound as for yourself. If in an unguarded moment, impelled by an irresistible passion—a passion that rises to adoration—I dared to give utterance to the feeling that swells my bosom—surely so venial a trespass may be forgiven. It is not in the nature of beauty to hate its worshipper! Say that you forgive me!"

"Forgive you, sir! He who has earned contempt, can claim no other sentiment for his wages. Hear me, since you force me to speak! Believing that you saw in my position one towards whom every familiarity may be permitted, you 'dared'—as you yourself have said—you dared to address me, at the very first word, if not in terms of licence, in a tone that left room for none but a degrading interpretation. It may so happen, sir, that your acquaintance with our sex has unhappily blinded you to what is pure and good—but you have this to learn, that the character even of an actress may be as highly placed as that of the noblest lady in the land. Shame to you, sir, that I should have to defend that character. Oblige me to say no more!"

She tried to pass Brunton as she spoke, but he effectually barred her passage.

"Miss Page!" he exclaimed, "listen to me also. You are doubly unjust in supposing that I erred from an evil motive. I only saw in you a creature to be loved

with all the truth and intensity of which the heart of man is capable. God is my witness that I had no thought of wrong! At the risk of again exciting your anger—for I will not believe that I incur your contempt—I declare to you here, with no witness but the sun that shines above us, that nothing can make me forego the hope of one day calling you mine. Yes, I swear it, by this—and this!"

He caught her hand, and pressed it twice to his lips. Claribel struggled to set herself free. Brunton heard voices on the river and the dash of oars; he relinquished his grasp, and the frightened girl, moving swiftly away, was lost in the shrubbery. There was a loud laugh and then an oath, but he did not wait to ascertain from whence either proceeded. He also turned and walked quickly back to the house. Claribel was not there.

"I am afraid, Ashley," he said, "that my time is up. I have a business engagement in town at three, and it is now half-past two, but my horse is a good stepper."

"What! are you going already?" said Dr. Brocas. "I thought to have shown you my pictures. You must, you say? Well, then, another time, and come as soon as you like. I shall keep all these things, Mr. Ashley."

Claribel saw Brunton leave the house, and when she knew that his carriage had driven away, she re-entered the room where Dr. Brocas was talking to her aunt.

"Better, child, I hope?" he said, as he went to meet her. "But no! you look worse. Good God, what has happened?"

Claribel made no answer, though more than once she tried. Failing altogether, she threw herself in Mrs. Basset's arms and burst into a flood of tears.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CONTRETEMPS.

QUESTIONED anxiously by Dr. Brocas and Mrs. Basset as to the cause of her tears, Claribel only replied by pleading extreme nervousness, the result, she supposed, of over study. Her pride would not allow her to confess the real cause, which was not alone the insolence of Brunton, but a misgiving, amounting almost to a conviction, that there had been other witnesses than themselves to his conduct in the garden.

She, as well as Brunton, had heard the laughter in the boat, and the angry exclamation which followed it; she had also seen—or fancied she saw—as she hastily broke away, the face of Lord Harry FitzLupus amongst the party on the river, and if this supposition were right, what conclusion might he not have drawn!

A desire for his good opinion had been predominant with Claribel ever since she became acquainted with him. It would have been difficult for her to have explained, even to herself, the cause of this desire, but its existence was certain, and the oftener she saw him the stronger it grew: a fact which might, indeed, be ascribed to the marked change that had taken place in his manner towards her, every trace of affectation having given way to a natural, manly tone, which expressed none but honest thoughts and genuine feelings. Perhaps Claribel had already detected the reason for this change! Perhaps the sisterly regard itself was changing!

But besides the contempt which she felt for Brunton, Claribel's delicacy shrank from the unpleasant task of making an *esclandre*. It is true she had not hesitated to utter her real sentiments to Mrs. Cutts; but with Dr.

Brocas the case was entirely different. His humour was so variable that it was all a chance how he might view the subject. She could not bear the idea of his treating it with ridicule, and making her, as was not unlikely, the theme of a perpetual jest; and, on the other hand, she dreaded an explosion of passion, for a fit of rage with him was always the precursor of a severe attack of gout. Claribel, therefore, resolved to remain silent about what had just taken place, but she also determined to prevent Brunton—as far as it lay in her power—from having a second private interview. For the last meeting she blamed herself, having given him the opportunity of following her into the garden: it must be a rare chance that should afford him another.

"It's what I meant to have told you, doctor," said Mrs Basset, who believed in her niece's explanation, "Clary does study too hard; this new part is a very heavy one; the whole weight of the piece is on her shoulders, and if she breaks down under it, why there's an end of everything."

Dr. Brocas glanced shrewdly at Claribel. He had not received for gospel the plea of nervousness from overwork; but though he saw that there was something concealed, it was impossible for him to guess precisely at its nature.

Of the real cause he had not the slightest suspicion, yet, had he suspected, he could hardly have applied a more searching test than the one he unconsciously employed.

Leaving Mrs. Basset's remark unanswered, he spoke of his new visitor. His vanity had been greatly flattered by Brunton's instant adoption of the whim which had puzzled Mr. Ashley, and he praised him highly.

"I like that readiness and presence of mind," he said: "it shows that the man who possesses it is capable of acting in any emergency My Hebrew friend, who knows what business is, tells me that Mr. Brunton stands very high in the City, and either has or will have an

enormous fortune. There is no character so deserving of respect, none for which I have so profound a veneration, as that of the British merchant. It has been a source of regret to me all my life that my excellent father did not put me into a counting-house instead of making me a lawyer. To be the possessor of millions, able by a word to influence the destinies of nations, to be the real arbiter of peace and war, the instrument of progress, the controller of public events—to be a Crœsus in expenditure, a Lucullus in magnificent enjoyment—such a position is the very acme for human ambition to long for! The efforts of learning, the reaches of art, the intrigues of diplomacy, alike fall short of the practical aims of commercial greatness. I envy not your Chancellors of the Exchequer, or your First Lords of the Treasury; the money they distribute is not their own—their tenure of office is but for a moment; but he who really makes me envious is the colossal capitalist; who thunders on the Stock Exchange and rules over the Three per Cents.!"

It is not in the least to be doubted that even a much milder opportunity of dealing in Consols would have been in the highest degree agreeable to Dr. Brocas, whose banker's balance was more frequently below zero than above it; but for the moment he appeared to despise the ordinary uses of money, and to be capable only of estimating its value in the mass.

"Why, what on earth, doctor," exclaimed literal Mrs. Basset—"what on earth would you do with the Three per Cents. if you had them in your trousers-pockets?"

"Do, my Bassettini!" he replied, "I would level mountains, cut through isthmuses, irrigate deserts, construct railroads, dig canals, build bridges, rear cathedrals, repeople solitudes, bring out the capabilities of the New World, and restore those of the Old. My name should be a beacon to all future generations. And this lofty eminence is attainable by no one but the enterprising British merchant. If I may claim some small

share in the faculty of prophetic vision, the man who will one day achieve the glorious distinction I point at is Mr. Brunton, the gentleman who only a quarter of an hour since was amongst us ;—Mr Brunton, I say ——"

What further eulogium he might have pronounced on one of whom he knew absolutely nothing, but whom he had taken so suddenly *en belle passion*, was cut short by the entrance of Mrs. Cutts.

For the first time in her life her presence was a real relief to Claribel. There was no way of checking Dr. Brocas when once he had mounted a fresh hobby but by allowing him to ride it until he was tired, unless a new object interposed to give a different current to his thoughts. The arrival of Mrs. Cutts effected an instantaneous diversion. Her look was so exulting, her air so confident, she seemed to be so sure of carrying her point, whatever it might happen to be, that she fairly took Dr. Brocas by surprise, and brought him to a full stop in the very midst of his harangue.

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Brocas," she said, as she entered the room—"I beg your pardon for forcing my way, as I may say, into your lovely abode—for there literally wasn't time for the servant to announce me—but I had something of so much consequence to say to Claribel, and knowing that I should find her here—so kind as you always are to my darling niece—that I positively did——"

Mrs. Cutts paused for a moment to take breath, and Dr. Brocas took advantage of it to assure her of the pleasure which her visit gave him.

"And if I may judge from appearances, my dear madam," he continued, "the communication which you have to make to our dear Claribel is not of a disagreeable nature. Pleasant tidings will, I am sure, be welcome: the little moppet stands in need of something to raise her spirits. I have been for this last half hour describing the most admirable condition of existence, and it has

failed to produce the slightest effect upon her. I hope you will be more successful."

Mrs. Cutts looked at her niece attentively. It was a new thing to be told that Claribel was not cheerful.

"Oh, never fear, sir," she replied; "I think I can safely answer for that. But what I have to tell her must —for the present, at all events—be private."

"You must not take her away, though, my dear Mrs. Cutts," said Dr. Brocas. "I am curious to see if Claribel bears good fortune with equanimity. Remember, child, that in this life we ought to have no wants, be moved by no ambitious wishes. The only happiness is content: a cup of water and a crust of bread are of more real value than all the wealth of the universe.

Claribel could not help smiling. A moment before, and the descant of Dr. Brocas had been the inappreciable utility of riches. But she was accustomed to his love of paradox. What concerned her more, just then, was to know what Mrs. Cutts could have to tell her that made a private interview necessary.

"I am quite ready, aunt," she said, "to hear your wonderful news. I certainly do hope with Dr. Brocas that it won't quite overwhelm me. Has Mr. Wimple relented about the plume of feathers, and may I play in my own hair only?"

"Something better than that," replied Mrs. Cutts with an arch smile. "Come with me, Clary—Dr Brocas will excuse us for a few minutes.

"I may come too, I suppose?" said Mrs Basset, rising.

"No, no, my Bassettini," said Dr. Brocas. "Don't you see your sister wishes too be alone with Claribel?" You shall stay with me till they return. Sit down to this chess-board. I'll try to teach you how to avoid fool's mate: you have already learnt the moves."

Reluctantly Mrs. Basset obeyed, while her sister and her niece left the room, taking their way into the garden and following the same path by which Brunton had

gone. It led them to the spot which Claribel had so abruptly quitted.

Mrs. Cutts did not open her lips till she reached this place.

"We are far enough from the house," she said. "I don't wish anybody to overhear us. Let us sit under those trees that face the river."

"Clary, dear," said Mrs. Cutts, when they were seated, "you know what a great regard I have for you. I haven't been so much with you as your aunt Basset, but for all that, though I say it, I've done you a great deal more good. How should you like to be married?"

"Married, aunt!" exclaimed Claribel, in visible astonishment.

"Married! yes, married," returned Mrs. Cutts; "the thing itself is not very surprising. All girls marry—if they can."

"I have never thought about it, aunt," said Claribel, quietly.

"Then it is time you should begin, for there is a gentleman who means to propose to you."

"He has made you his confidante in the matter?"

"Just so. Only yesterday. I could not see you last night, so have come the first thing to-day to bring the good news.

"But are you sure the news *is* good?"

"Let me alone for that. You will jump at it, Clary, when I tell you who he is. Guess now."

'I shall never be able to guess, for I don't know a single human being—that is, nobody at all likely."

"What do you think of a lord?"

"A lord!" repeated Claribel.

"Lord Harry FitzLupus—the fourth son of the Marquis of Wolverton!" cried Mrs. Cutts triumphantly.

Claribel's cheek became pale: the next moment it was crimson. The scene not yet an hour old, which Lord Harry, she believed, had witnessed, rushed painfully

back to her memory. There was shame in the recollection, whether she loved him or not.

"I knew it," said Mrs. Cutts. "It always takes away the breath. The same thing happened to me once—not, however," she added, in a lower tone, "when I married Cutts." Then aloud: "Well, Clary, what do you say?"

"My dear aunt," replied Claribel, "how could I have expected this! You surely are not in earnest."

"As much in earnest now as Lord Harry was yesterday," rejoined Mrs. Cutts. "Will that satisfy you?"

Mrs. Cutts waited for Claribel's answer, but she remained silent.

"Why don't you speak?" resumed Mrs. Cutts, after a pause of some moments.

"I don't know what to think or say," returned Claribel, in a low voice.

"I broke it rather suddenly, perhaps," said Mrs. Cutts; "take your time. Now then?"

"My dear aunt," said Claribel, making a strong effort, "it is very kind of you—of Lord Harry FitzLupus—he is always most kind,—most friendly—but I have never dreamt of him as a lover."

"Dream of him as a husband, Clary, for he means it. I never saw any one in such a state in my life as he was yesterday. I happened to mention the possibility of your going abroad with Dr. Brocas, and he burst out at once, more like a volcano than an officer in the Guards. He said he was mad about you—quite mad. Think of that; a man of his rank!"

Claribel sighed.

"Ah, my dear aunt," she said, "even if I could bring myself to the state of mind you desire, you have mentioned an insurmountable difficulty. His rank is in itself an objection."

"Nonsense, child, rank has nothing to do with it. When a man's in love he only cares for that."

"But others care for something more: his family and friends! No, aunt, it must not be thought of."

"But I tell you, Clary," said Mrs. Cutts, warmly, "it must and shall be thought of! A fig for his family and friends! He wouldn't be the first lord, by a score, who has married an actress; indeed, you can hardly be said to be that; not six months out, people would soon forget you ever were on the stage. Besides, why should you make a difficulty if he don't?"

"Because, aunt, I feel it would be wrong to give him any encouragement. Putting the stage aside, are any of us in a condition to justify me in seeking to be the wife of a nobleman?"

"Fiddlestick about condition! A pretty girl may marry where she pleases. All the world's open to her, from the lowest to the highest. Your relations, perhaps, are not all of them dukes and duchesses, but you seem to forget that your mother married a gentleman!"

"That ought to be a warning, aunt, and not an example: his family disowned him."

"More shame for them. The matter should never have dropped as it did if I'd been in England when your father died. Your poor mother was a great deal too meek and forbearing, and when once his people set their faces against her, she succoomed. It's my firm belief that she knew who your father really was, as well as he did, though she never would tell any one, not even your aunt Harriet, after she went to live with her. As for me, I was abroad, as you know, till after your mother's death, or I'd have pretty soon found out.—But all this, Clary, is nothing to the purpose. The long and the short of it is, Lord Harry's in love with you, and you musn't say No!'"

"But I fear I can't say 'Yes!'"

"That's of no consequence; you needn't say anything. Silence gives consent."

"But silence on my part would be deceit."

"Not if you have any liking for him."

"'Liking,' aunt, to use your own word, I have already, —the liking of a friend; but as yet I feel nothing more."

"That's quite good enough for a beginning; the rest will soon follow. Lord bless your heart, Clary, I didn't care a pinch of snuff for Cutts when I married *him*,—and see how we get on!"

This parallel was not very exact, nor the argument very conclusive, and Claribel's smile said as much. Taking no notice, however, of the comparison, she replied:

"Were all obstacles removed, dear aunt, still I must love the man I marry. But the subject is an idle one, for again I repeat, it can never be. Report says that the Marquis of Wolverton is the proudest man in England. He would never consent to Lord Harry's marriage, and without his consent, freely given, not extorted, Lord Harry shall never have mine!"

"Upon my word, Miss Claribel," said Mrs. Cutts, angrily, "you take things with a high hand! Is this the answer you mean to give?"

"I can give no other—I ought to give no other."

"I don't believe it. It's all very well for you to tell *me* so, but when Lord Harry asks you himself I shall hear a different story."

"After what has taken place between ourselves, aunt, I must not see Lord Harry again."

"Not see him again! That would be a disappointment indeed! Why, I strongly suspect he is waiting to see you now. I made a kind of appointment to meet him here to-day. He was to be on the river, and it's only a stone's-throw from Putney-bridge to Vallombrosa." Again the colour deeply dyed the cheek of Claribel. It must have been Lord Harry whom she saw!

If any doubt could have remained on her mind, it was speedily removed by what at that moment happened.

"As true as I live," exclaimed Mrs. Cutts, "here he comes!"

Claribel started and turned towrds the house.

"Not there, not there, Clary! In that boat! He's going past! He don't know the place. Lord Harry! Lord Harry!

Mrs. Cutts aided her voice by waving her handkerchief to attract his attention.

The boat came swiftly down the stream. Lord Harry was steering, but, as it seemed, mechanically, for his head was bent and he looked in deep thought; one of the tiller ropes had slipped from his hand, and the boat came close to the shore.

"The landing-place is higher up, my lord," screamed Mrs. Cutts.

Lord Harry was roused from his reverie. He looked up and saw Claribel and Mrs. Cutts, who held her niece fast by the hand. He rose in the boat; his countenance was very grave; it wore even a stern expression; he did not attempt to speak, but looking full in Claribel's face he lifted his hat, and then, without noticing Mrs. Cutts, he turned to his friends, who had rested on their oars.

"Give way," he said, in a sharp tone; and the boat shot swiftly ahead.

Claribel trembled violently; Mrs. Cutts, with open mouth, looked the picture of astonishment.

"What on earth," she exclaimed, as soon as she recovered the use of speech—"what on earth can be the reason of this! Lord Harry must have lost his senses. Clary, can you explain?"

"For God's sake, aunt," replied Claribel, "ask me no questions! Nothing can come of this! It was folly in the beginning; its end can be only folly!"

She disengaged her hand and walked away. Mrs. Cutts followed the boat with her eyes till it was completely out of sight. Lord Harry did not once look back.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FAR OFF, YET NEAR.

MR. TEMPLE TRAVERS had reported truly when he said that Philip Hastings was getting on well in India.

Endowed with first-rate abilities, energetic in all his pursuits, steady in his conduct, and devoted to his profession, he soon made himself a name in his regiment, and was looked upon by all who had discernment as one who was sure to rise—by opportunity if it offered, but, if it came not, by making opportunity.

There were three subjects that chiefly filled his mind: the ambition to be distinguished; the desire to ascertain his father's fate; and the hope of one day gaining the hand of Alice Travers.

Of the first he never despaired: the second he cherished for his mother's sake; the third seemed all but impossible, yet he clung to it in spite of the chances and changes which the absent have only too commonly the right to fear.

There might, it is true, be something to encourage hope in the fact that, in all his mother's letters—and she wrote to him by every mail—he read the same gratifying intelligence, that Alice still remined unmarried: he learnt, too, that Mrs. Hastings saw her constantly, and that he was frequently the theme of her conversation. Of whom, indeed, could a mother more naturally speak than of her only son? Neither was it unnatural that Alice should feel interested in hearing of the welfare of one who had for so many years been her constant companion. Hence the kind messages which she sent, though, kind as they were, Philip would gladly have exchanged them all for one single line in her own handwriting. Still she remembered him, and sought to be

brought to his remembrance: that was much, under the circumstances of time and distance, and all "the distractions of a various lot;" and there was this in addition, that Alice told his mother of more than one refusal, on her part, to marry. Was it possible, Philip sometimes asked himself, that these communications were made in the hope of their being repeated to him? Was he wrong in the instinct, if it were no more, which assured him of the existence of a deeper feeling than friendship in the bosom of Alice Travers? But however he might indulge in the day-dreams of his love, the same honourable spirit that had prompted him to self-banishment, pervaded all he wrote to his mother in reply: a more cordial and earnest expression of thanks could not be conveyed in words, but Mr. Temple Travers himself might have read his letters, undisturbed by a shadow of apprehension.

At a very early period of his Indian experience, Philip Hastings became convinced that there was no more certain road to promotion than the acquirement of an intimate knowledge of the natives, as well the people in general as the troops with whom he served. He studied, therefore, not merely their language, but their habits, character, thoughts, and feelings, and as far as the difference of station and religion would permit, identified himself completely with those who surrounded him. This study, which, in the abstract, gave him infinite pleasure, was greatly facilitated by the frequent removals of his regiment and the detachment duties on which he was employed, so that in the course of three years there was no one of his standing, in the army or amongst the "politicals," who could give so good an account as young Hastings of all that was passing or likely to come to pass on either side of the Indus. His talents were fortunately appreciated by the local government, and a separate command of irregular cavalry was the first decisive indication of its approval.

This appointment was the means of bringing him still near[illegible] country which he had always been so

desirous of exploring—the scene of his father's presumed death, or, at all events, the place where, when alive, he had last been heard of—and Philip Hastings left no effort untried to satisfy his own and his mother's yearning. In vain, however, were all the attempts he made to procure reliable information: the district in which it was supposed Colonel Hastings was killed had frequently changed masters, villages had been swept away, populations dispersed, and vague traditions at best were the substitutes for substantial records.

But as in searching for one thing you often find another of equal value with what is lost, so it happened to Philip Hastings that, failing to discover any trace of his father—which would, without doubt, have had some marked effect on his subsequent career—he came to the knowledge of circumstances which, in the end, materially influenced his fortunes.

While stationed in the Punjab, accident made him acquainted with a man of singular character and peculiar position.

It arose in this way.

For some time previous to the organisation of the irregular corps which Philip Hastings commanded, the whole of the country lying between the Chenab and the Sutlej had been overrun by a notorious robber-chief, named Juggernaut Chuprassee, who committed the most fearful outrages, plundering the villages, destroying the crops, and murdering the defenceless inhabitants. No better service could be rendered the province than that of ridding it of the presence of this man, and Philip Hastings readily undertook the task.

Being quartered at Moultan, his field of operations lay directly before him, and quitting that city with a body of about twenty horsemen, he proceeded towards the robber's principal haunt. Impunity had begotten indifference to the measures of the government in the mind of Juggernaut Chuprassee, and he took no pains to conceal his movements, so that Hastings had no difficulty

in tracking his course, which, indeed, was evident enough in the devastation by which it was marked.

It was the season of the year when the pilgrims, who travel from all parts of India to the great fair of Hurdwar, return to their homes after worshipping Ganga on the *ghaut* which piety has raised amid the head waters of the sacred river. Juggernaut Chuprassee cared little for the religious object which set the population in motion, but he was greatly interested in the fact that amongst the multitude were many of the wealthiest in the community; and these he made his spoil, robbing or holding to ransom all who fell in his way.

One evening the scouts whom Hastings had sent out returned to his encampment with the news that Juggernaut Chuprassee was only a few miles distant, preparing, as they judged, to bivouac for the night in one of the gorges through which the high road passed that led from Moultan to Loodeeanah. Here was a favourable opportunity for surprising the robber, and Hastings gave immediate orders for moving on. The moon had risen, and the party advanced with caution. After a march of about two hours they had nearly reached the entrance of the defile, when the stillness of the night was suddenly broken by loud cries. Hastings halted his men and listened attentively to learn the nature of the noise. He was not left long in doubt; shouts for assistance were mingled with the most savage yells, and he guessed at once that the band of Juggernaut Chuprassee had attacked a caravan: it was an ambuscade, and not a bivouac, which the robber had prepared.

Hastings spurred his horse and rode quickly up to a turn in the road from whence the whole extent of the gorge was visible. His conjecture was correct: the broad moonlight which flooded the sky revealed what was passing as clearly as if it had been shown by day. Several hundred yards below the spot where he stood the gorge narrowed to its utmost limit: this point had been chosen for the attack, and there the travellers lay

at the mercy of their ferocious assailants, and small was the mercy they showed them: a sword thrust accompanied every cry, and some unhappy wretch fell beneath the stroke.

There was no time to be lost for saving or for slaying. Hastings gave a signal to his troop, who formed on the crest of the hill in as broad a front as the width of the road permitted, and then, without a word, as their leader lifted his hand they charged on the unprepared foe.

So rapid was the movement and so unexpected the assault, that the greater part of the robbers were scattered or cut down in as brief a time as it has taken to tell of their discomfiture: those fled who could, but from the nature of the ground they were very few in number; only about three or four, at the head of whom was Juggernaut Chuprassee, defended themselves like men. The robber-chief seemed intuitively to know that the attacking party were led by an English officer: he shouted an opprobrious word of defiance, and rode straight at Hastings with uplifted sword, hoping, if he killed him, to cut his way through his followers and make his escape. But the young man's eye was on him: he parried the blow and shivered the robber's weapon. The two foes now were almost side by side. Juggernaut Chuprassee crouched in his saddle and made a spring to seize the Englishman by the body and hurl him to the ground. Too near to strike with effect, Hastings swung round his horse as quick as thought, and before the robber could recover his seat he was caught by the heavy sweep of his antagonist's sabre, and rolled in the dust with his head cleft right in two. On seeing him fall, the others, who had till then fiercely resisted, threw down their swords and called upon the English officer to spare their lives. Had it depended on the Irregulars, every single robber would have been put to death on the spot, but Hastings ordered them to be made prisoners, and they were seized and bound. He then directed his attention to the people whom he had rescued.

Out of twelve persons who formed the caravan, so fierce had been the onslaught that all but one were stretched upon the ground apparently dead. He who had thus escaped was the principal personage of the whole party, a rich Baboo, a native of Moultan, whither he was returning from Hurdwar. As he sat, almost stupified with grief and fear, amid the ruins of his palanquin, Hastings addressed him in the dialect of the country, bidding him be of good cheer, for that all danger now was over.

The Baboo sighed heavily and tried to rise, but he was a very stout man, and could not do so without the assistance of his deliverer. At last, being fairly on his legs again, he surveyed the field of battle, and when he had counted the slain his equanimity returned, and citing one of the laws of Menu, he calmly said, in Sanscrit:

"The soldier who, fearing and turning his back, happens to be slain by his foes in an engagement, shall take upon himself all the sin of his commander, whatever it be.

"And the commander shall take to himself the fruit of all the good conduct, which the soldier, who turns his back and is killed, had previously stored up for a future life."

Hastings, who understood what he said, could not but admire the coolness with which the Baboo at once disposed of the poor fellows who had actually fallen in his defence, and the complacency which appropriated their virtues to himself.

"And again," continued the Baboo, as he turned to look upon the dead body of Juggernaut Chuprassee, "the slayer of a twice-born man shall inevitably sink to the condition of a brute. Multifarious tortures await him: he shall be mangled by ravens and owls; shall swallow cakes boiling hot; shall walk over inflamed sands; and shall feel the pangs of being baked like the vessels of a potter. He shall assume the form of a beast continually miserable."

Having thus settled the condition of his fallen foe according to the most orthodox receipt for transmigration, the Baboo held out his hand to Hastings, and sedately offered his thanks.

"I am sorry," said Hastings, "that we did not come up with these rascals a little sooner. All your people might then have been saved."

"It must be as it is," replied the Baboo, philosophically; "we cannot bring them to life by weeping."

And as weeping was useless, the Baboo did not even offer to shed a tear.

"But," said Hastings, who could not reconcile himself so easily to the scene before him—"are they all dead? Let us see."

It turned out that seven of the number had been killed outright, three were severely wounded, and one lay motionless without a wound, as if he had died of fright.

After caring for the wounded, and following the Baboo's example in not lamenting the departed, they examined the individual whose condition seemed so mysterious. He was raised up, and when placed in a sitting posture, to the surprise of all he opened his eyes, a process which made those who beheld him open theirs still wider.

One of the Irregulars asked him what had been the matter, but he made no answer, and the Baboo observed that they were only losing their time in vain questions, for to the best of his belief the man had lost the use of his tongue, at least to all intelligible purposes. He then made a gesture which seemed to be quickly comprehended, for the "party"—so to designate him—immediately threw himself on all fours, and scoured away to the palanquin with the swiftness of a beast of prey. Arrived there, he busied himself in putting the broken vehicle to rights, and then came back to his master, with as much speed and in the same attitude as before. He had a singularly wild and sinister look, and every

movement denoted the most remarkable strength and agility.

"You have a strange kind of servant there," said Hastings to the Baboo.

"Very strange, but very useful," was the reply. "I will tell you his history. This creature, by the sentence of Yama, has transmigrated before his time. He is now eighteen years of age, and when only three years old was carried off from the village of Chuprah by a wolf. Nine years afterwards two hunters from Sultanpore fell in with a well-grown boy, in company of three young wolves, on the edge of a jungle near Chuprah. The hunters gave chase immediately, the cubs escaped, but the boy was captured while trying to force his way after his companions through a crevice in some rocks. He was taken to the bazaar, when, owing to certain marks on his body, he was recognised as the child that had been lost. It was soon found that he was a flesh-eater, and of unclean habits, one sunk to the level of a Sùdra. His parents dreaded to keep him; he became unto them as a pariah, like the dogs he consorted and fed with. By the decree of Bráma I passed one day through the village of Chuprah, and the boy was shown to me. Instead of slinking away from my presence as he did from that of all others, he came and crouched at my feet. Then I saw what had been ordained. At a sign from me he followed, and ever since he has been by my side. Though but a worm, I obey the sacred law, and when his penance is expiated, this creature, by my prayers, may one day become a twice-born man."

In the mean time, it seemed that he had twice the activity of any other man, and nothing could exceed his docility. So that it was quite clear, whether Brámah relented or not, that the Baboo had got, as he said, a very useful servant.

This adventure was the commencement of a friendship between Hastings and the Baboo, to which the latter testified on every possible occasion.

"I have learnt," said Hastings, in one of his letters to his mother, in which he related the particulars above described—"I have learnt more of this country in a few hours' conversation with the Baboo Gooroo Chunder Danurjee, than I could have gained in any other manner in as many months. He is a man whose knowledge of India is perfect: he has relations with all parts of the peninsula, and seems to be acquainted with everything that is going on. He sometimes talks in a strain that I do not exactly comprehend, and when I press him to be more explicit, he tells me to wait.. What I am to wait for I know not, but I hope it is not my promotion. I do not like to be a suitor for what I think I deserve, but perhaps if you were to suggest a favourable word to the Court of Directors from Mr. Temple Travers, the command I now hold might soon be accompanied by brevet rank. I must mention something I had almost forgotten. Ram Sing is, I think, as much attached to me as he is to the Baboo. What an odd thing to have a wehr-wolf for one's friend!"

We leave Philip Hastings to the hopes that light his way like stars, and turn to him who treads the same path in darkness.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IT "NEVER DID RUN SMOOTH."

If Brunton's love affair with Claribel did not prosper as he desired, indemnity was offered him in the affection of Margaret Nalders.

The question was, did he look upon it as an indemnity?

And the answer he gave to that question said, Only so far as it assisted his views.

These views—the business ones especially—began to develop themselves more and more every day. Not, however, to the extent of causing him to neglect a single mesh of the web which he was weaving.

Welcomed by Mr. Travers, he frequently met Alice at the old house in Broad-street, and whether there or elsewhere—for he had been permitted to call in Belgrave-square—he was received with much kindness by the heiress.

Alice was deeply grateful to him on account of her dearest friend, and that friend—being impressed by Brunton with the necessity of representing him in the best light to the daughter of Mr. Temple Travers, so that the great man also might be favourably disposed towards him—left nothing unsaid that could advance his cause.

She little knew the nature of the cause she advocated!

Beneath a calm and gentle exterior, which nothing till now had stirred, strong feelings lay deep in the heart of Margaret Nalders. The world had swept past without giving her its love, and though she smiled to see it pass, as if its love were not worth having, a void was still within—a yearning dwelt unsatisfied. At last there came the object which, sooner or later, all meet—or deem they meet with—and the passion which Brunton feigned, she felt in all its force.

To devote herself to the interests of the man who had given to the life he saved its only value, was a duty she at once accepted, subject to all the conditions he imposed. She had even of her own impulse suggested a course by which his prosperity might be ensured; and remembering this, in conjunction with Brunton's expressed desire, her whole thought was bent to one issue.

Nor was there anything in her advocacy that appeared unnatural or out of place.

Brunton acknowledged high aims, but none could doubt, from what he said, that he was guided to them by

the purest and loftiest motives. He admitted that he was no stranger to ambition, but it was the laudable ambition to do good, and in that direction he traced the path with circumstantial plainness. If not so eloquent as Dr. Brocas, Brunton was more convincing, and whether it were Alice Travers or Margaret Nalders who listened, his hearer believed.

But there was harder stuff in Brunton than went to enslave the mind or the heart of woman. He had violent passions, and those led him one way: he had the greed of gain upon him—perhaps for the indulgence of his passions—and that took him another. To become a Millionaire was the paramount idea of his life, and as he looked round him he felt that wider dreams than his had been realised.

Yet, independently as Brunton wished to act, there was one control from which he could not free himself—the influence of Mr. Ashley. It was something more than the bond he had given him that made Brunton, if not his slave, in almost all things subservient to his will. There were private transactions with Mr. Ashley which never appeared on Brunton's books, although the result already swelled the balance at his banker's. There were others, identifying him in a great degree with the house of Temple Travers, which, if completed according to the calculations of Mr. Ashley and himself, held out the brightest promise. And apart from these, whose objects were special and known only to Brunton and his secret adviser, there were the general business engagements which all the world had cognizance of, and which, the greater their extent, the world the more admired.

"Be bold, be bold, and everywhere be bold!" was the legend which Brunton had adopted for his motto, and he found his account in doing so.

With capital at his command, and the opportunity for its most favourable investment, with credit which was increasing daily, and a reputation for success—and consequent wealth—established, there surely was enough to

have satisfied the cravings of the most eager commercial enterprise. But Brunton knew, perhaps, that the ground on which he trod was hollow, that it might one day crumble beneath his feet, and to guard against such a catastrophe he strove to arm his bow with a second and surer string.

The wealth which Miss Temple Travers would inherit was almost fabulous; according to public report, it was more than sufficient to prop up any deficiency, however large, retrieve any false speculation, however ruinous. Once master of that, he might defy the hazard of the game by whose fascination he was so deeply enthralled. It was necessary to his ultimate success that he should look to a double event: a reputation for wealth to sustain his matrimonial pretensions, and the money itself to support or cover the ventures in which he embarked.

Brunton was one who could contemplate a crash with the greatest coolness, but nobody took greater precaution than he to hedge against such a contingency.

This was the reason why he hampered himself with all the difficulties attendant on his pursuit of the great heiress,—not the least of which was the declaration of his love for Margaret Nalders.

"A broken heart, more or less," he said, as he ruminated over his projects, "will not prevent the sun from shining every day, nor the world from turning on its axis. Women were made for man's purposes according to the shape in which he fashions them. Alice is essential to my prospects—Margaret is the ladder by which I climb —and Claribel—ah, Claribel—she is the one thing needful to my existence. If I could have done without Margaret I would; to forego all of Alice but her money were no sacrifice; but not to possess Claribel is to render life itself a hateful, wearisome burden: all three must, therefore, submit to my will. It is perfectly clear that only one of them can be my wife, and quite as evident who that wife must be. Pity they can't change places, or merge into the same person Alice's fortune, Margaret's

love, and Claribel's beauty! How happy their possessor! Claribel's beauty! And why not Claribel's love? As yet I have only been honoured by her aversion. The humourist says it is best to begin with that. He means that women rush into extremes. No answer to my letter! That is of a piece with her repelling coldness. I have twice offended her. How will she resent my offences? Who is to be her champion? Not the fantastic virtuoso—not the paternal manager—certainly not my kind, accommodating friend Tom Cutts! Is there no one else? Oh, yes! Suppose, *par hasard*, it happened to be Lord Harry FitzLupus! I have a kind of notion it was his intellectual face and classical language that put an end to our last interview. Lord Harry had better take care. I know rather more of his affairs than he of mine. Ashley holds bills enough to swamp him over and over again. He would part with them to me for a proper consideration; so again I say, Lord Harry FitzLupus, beware! No championship then. Perhaps no occasion for any! If Claribel makes no appeal, there is nothing to fear;—a great deal to hope. She has already in her hands the assumed evidence of my penitence, the renewed avowal of my love. The first she may believe,—the last she cannot doubt. Women, beyond all other things, are won by perseverance; and where is the woman who hates a man for telling her that she is beautiful,—for telling her that he loves! Claribel is a woman like the rest. She will yield at last. I must wait a little longer. If waiting, and pleading in all humility, should fail, a different course must be adopted. In the meantime I must not lose sight of my tools. And first, to find out Cutts."

The search was not very difficult. There were given periods in every day when the *habitat* of Tom Cutts might be discovered with perfect certainty, by those who knew him well. Like the imaginary shepherd of the philosophising king—philosophising in the midst of battle—Mr. Cutts divided his days into their allotted

uses; and the comparison was most in point when he spoke of shearing fleeces.

Mention has been made, in one of the foregoing chapters, of the class of gentlemen who frequent the locality which bears the name of "Lemon tree-yard." Low sporting, in all its varieties, was the great *penchant* of Mr. Cutts, and in that neighbourhood he was fully enabled to cultivate his tastes. Mr. Cutts was known in most of the "Stores" and "Divans" which abound in Windmill-street and the upper part of the Haymarket, but his favourite haunt was Lillicrap's, just seven doors and a half from the corner of Jermyn-street.

There is a bar at Lillicrap's which is well attended by parties in long-bodied waistcoats, loose drab shorts, and very much wrinkled gaiters;—parties who generally have sprigs of rosemary in their mouths, which they manage to keep there while they drink; parties who always look down when they talk to each other, and whose muttered monosyllabic words are few and far between, the only similitude they bear to things of angelic nature.

But Mr. Cutts, though he does not disdain to make use of the bar, *en passant*, while he exchanges monosyllables with the worthies in shorts and gaiters, calls for what he takes in the parlour up-stairs, an indication of which convenience is blazoned in gold on Lillicrap's taproom window. In that parlour you might put your finger on Mr Cutts at any time between nine at night and some small hour on the following morning, and thither Brunton went to seek him.

As smoking was not strictly prohibited in Lillicrap's genteel establishment, a somewhat cloudy atmosphere prevented Brunton from immediately discovering his friend; but at length he caught sight of him in a corner —a long pipe in his mouth and a glass of something-and-water on the table before him—listening to an individual whose appearance was eminently sporting. From the confidential, not to say the mysterious, manner of this gentle-

man, Brunton inferred that something "dark" was on the *tapis*, but as he had no time to spare he did not hesitate to interrupt the pair.

"I want to speak to you," he said, touching Cutts on the shoulder; "can it be here or outside?"

Mr. Cutts looked up, and seeing who it was that addressed him, nodded to his companion, and said, "You'll excuse us, Hinkin. Business!"

"Mr. Hinkin, who thoroughly understood the meaning of this last word, rose at once, and in an off-hand way observed:

"Well, I was just a goin' to mizzle. There's a stunnin' silver mug to be ratted for at arf-p'st nine, over at Jemmy Shaw's, and I've a black and tan as I think will do the trick. Bivens takes the cheer arterwards, and I faces 'im. Good evenin,' Mr. C. You'll keep an eye on that 'ere! If you want any nice blue rocks, I know of a party as can perwide the werry best—to be heerd of at Parnaby's. Your servant, sir!"

And touching his hat to Brunton, Mr Hinkin withdrew.

"That's a capital fellow!" said Mr. Cutts; "has done more ratting, perhaps, than any man living."

"A vast accomplishment!" returned Brunton. "He ought to be in Parliament."

"He's got the smallest white stock bull-dog in the world!" continued Mr. Cutts, in the same eulogistic strain. "A dog that can do anything; and so," he added, as Mr. Hinkin's form vanished amid the smoke—"and so can his master! What's more, he makes no bones about doing anything. Only pay him!"

"There's a possibility, then," said Brunton, "that one of these days Mr. Hinkin's talents may be turned to account; but we will leave him in the enjoyment of his rats for the present. Can we talk here? Is it safe?"

"As a church," replied Cutts. "Only you needn't speak too loud. As a general rule, nobody comes to

this place that hasn't business of his own to look after: other people's concerns don't trouble them."

"Very good. Now, tell me—when did you last see Claribel?

"About a week ago, I fancy."

"Where?"

"At our house."

"Has she been out to Fulham lately; since you saw her?"

"I believe she has. I know she was there just before."

"How do you know that?"

"Because my wife brought her back."

"Which day was that? Try and recollect."

Mr Cutts considered for a moment. He remembered. It was the day after Hampton races.

This corresponded with the date of Brunton's visit to Vallombrosa. He pursued his inquiry.

"Did you hear if anything particular had happened that day?"

"Yes—something had; but my wife's so devilish close I could not get at what it was."

"Then you learnt nothing?"

"Not from her."

"From any one else?"

"I'll tell you. In fact I meant to have found you out to-morrow to have told you."

"Why not sooner?"

"I didn't get at the rights of it till this afternoon"

Mr. Cutts drew a long whiff at his pipe, refreshed himself from his tumbler, and then proceeded:

"We keep a boy, you know. He goes on all my wife's errands. Lately he has had a good deal to do carrying out notes and bringing back answers. Now Mrs. Cutts is not, in general, over fond of letter-writing, and when I find she has taken so much to that amusement, I naturally wish to find out her correspondent. Bob swears by his mistress, but boys are boys, and

money's money. A crown did it. Sealing-wax is out of fashion; envelopes are easily opened, and a little gum makes 'em all right again. So that way I discovered all I wanted to know."

"What did you discover? asked Brunton, eagerly.

"That Lord Harry FitzLupus was head over ears in love with Clary. That there'd been a row of some kind between 'em. That it was all made up again. And that my wife congratulated Lord Harry on his success. Yes; 'success' was the word."

"Damnation!" muttered Brunton. "Do you think he wants to marry her?"

"How can I tell? Men do strange things at times."

"And Claribel? Do you think—no, she can't be—is she fond of the —— fellow?"

"All I can say is, that when I left home this afternoon, my wife was in a better humour than ever I saw her. When I left she was on her way to Brompton: you may guess what for."

Brunton's brow was as black as night. He threw himself back in his chair, folded his arms, and reflected gloomily for several minutes. At last he appeared to have come to some resolution.

Taking out his pocket-book, he opened it and produced a bank-note for a hundred pounds. He held it between his finger and thumb while he spoke.

"I didn't forget you," he said, "about the consignment I promised. You'll clear a good seventy per cent. by it. But perhaps you're in want of cash. Here's some on account. There may be expenses."

Mr. Cutts satisfied himself of the amount, and folding up the note deposited it in his waistcoat pocket.

"When is the best time for seeing Wimple?" inquired Brunton.

"I should say," answered Mr. Cutts, "in the morning, before rehearsal, between nine and ten o'clock. At his own house."

"Give me his address,"

Mr. Cutts wrote it down.

"Shall you see that Mr. Hinkin again to-night?"

"I *can* see him—if you wish it."

"Do so, then. Tell him to meet you here to-morrow night. I'll let you know what for. You say he's not particular?"

"Not very!" returned Mr. Cutts, dryly. "Between you and me, Brunton—it needn't go any further—Hinkin's a ticket-of-leave!"

"So much the better."

They went down stairs, and parted at the door. Mr. Cutts crossed over to Jemmy Shaw's. Brunton wandered about the streets for half the night. He lingered for full two hours before the house of the little watchmaker where Claribel was sleeping. The day broke before he reached home. His jealous fury was brooding over vengeance.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IMPROVED PROSPECTS.

It was true, as Mr. Cutts had said, that there had been an *éclaircissement* between his wife and Lord Harry FitzLupus, and equally true that the explanation was dangerous to Brunton's hopes, though it had not yet resulted in what he so greatly feared.

Mrs. Cutts had contrived to elicit from Claribel a full account of the scene in the garden which Lord Harry had accidentally witnessed, but the confession had been wrung from her, more by a sense of what was due to her own reputation, than with the view—from which she instinctively shrank—of offering encouragement to her lover, for whom—she again repeated—the regard she felt was only an earnest friendship. Mrs. Cutts put her

own interpretation on this expression, believing that earnest friendship, under certain circumstances, is easily convertible into love. She promised, however, to suffer affairs to take their natural course, preserving silence on the subject to Dr. Brocas, and even undertaking to persuade Lord Harry to desist from urging his suit, at all events for the present.

These promises cost Mrs. Cutts very little, as she intended to be guided entirely by her own interest in keeping or breaking them; but her acquiescence in Claribel's wish was the readier, in consequence of holding sentiments with respect to a lover's impatience very similar to those of the prudent Mrs. Peachum.

Nor was she far out in her estimate of Lord Harry. He was one of those who, the more they feel the curb, the more they chafe. The history of the situation, as related by Mrs. Cutts, increased his love for Claribel, while it roused his fury against the man who had caused him for a moment to wrong her, and woe betide that man if ever he fell in his way.

But whatever effect the communication might have had on his immediate acts, whether it would have led him to an instant declaration to Claribel herself, or to the instant punishment of Brunton, was prevented by an occurrence which just at that moment befel. The Marquis of Wolverton, the father of Lord Harry, was suddenly seized with an alarming illness, and the telegraph was set in motion to summon his family to his bedside. Not having been, at any period of his life, an over affectionate parent, he was not—as fashionable newspapers say—"surrounded by his noble relations" at the time of his seizure, but the greater number within reach obeyed the call,—Lord Harry among the rest, who thus, in a manner, left the field open to Brunton.

Meantime, Dr. Brocas continued in ignorance of the proceedings which so nearly affected Claribel. In the midst of all his eccentricities, his fondness for her never changed. Nothing would have rejoiced him more than

to have been able to secure her happiness, but his general unsteadiness of purpose, and the caprices by which he was governed, sadly interfered with his good intentions.

At one moment he desired for Claribel no higher or better fame than that of a great actress; at another, the theatrical profession disgusted him, as quite incompatible with feminine delicacy and true refinement, and he was all for literature and art; then he expressed the strongest objections to a young woman's appearance before the public in any shape, declaring that her name ought never to travel beyond the limits of her own family circle.

"Yes," he would exclaim, when the homely fit was on him, "woman has only one mission. Her beauty may dazzle, her talents charm, her manners fascinate, but what are these attractions, in which the whole world has an equal share, compared with the solid, substantial accomplishments of making a suet-pudding or darning her husband's worsted stockings! Around these housewifely acts are grouped all the comforts of existence, all the domestic virtues!

The domestic virtues, however, held very brief sway over the aspirations of Dr. Brocas. He turned more congenially to a life of splendour, and then he pictured Claribel at the head of a magnificent establishment.

But how was she to obtain one?

Could he have coined his own debts and put the amount in his pocket, he might have given her an ample fortune; but, as the case actually stood, he could give nothing unless he got it on tick. A rich husband, then, who did not care for money, if such a phenomenon existed, must be the resource.

Where was this person to be found?

His thoughts reverted to Brunton. He was in the prime of life, good-looking, extremely clever, and—as Mr. Ashley had told him—wealthy; against his morals, so far as Dr. Brocas knew, nothing was to be said. Dr. Brocas was in the vein for worshipping The Golden

Calf, and decided, therefore, in his own mind, that Brunton should be the man.

But, while he entertained this project, he determined to keep it secret. Nothing delighted him more than a surprise. He piqued himself on his diplomatic tact, and skill in strategy. How he would laugh at Claribel when she was caught in his net!

To carry out his design it was necessary to improve his acquaintance with Brunton, whom he forthwith invited to dine at the cottage.

Brunton received the invitation by the first post on the morning after his meeting with Mr. Cutts at Lillicrap's. He could hardly believe his good fortune. Had he read the letter rightly? It ran thus:

"DEAR SIR,—The visit which you paid to Vallombrosa, when you were so kind as to call with Mr. Ashley, was unfortunately too short to enable me properly to appreciate the value of your society. Will you permit an old man to say that he has a great desire to know more of you, and—waiving ceremony—will you honour me with your company at dinner to-morrow, at seven o'clock? It will be an absolute *tête-à-tête*, and I hope for no refusal.

"Most faithfully yours,
"WILLIAM BROCAS."

"Will I waive ceremony? Do you hope for no refusal? Ah, my dear Dr. Brocas," exclaimed Brunton, as he sat down to write an answer, "you don't know how much money I would have given for this invitation! For to-day, I see! You shall have a special messenger. When I began to despair of getting at Claribel again! It is clear she has said nothing to him. I have nothing to apprehend in that quarter. A *tête-à-tête! Tant mieux*, on this occasion. I shall endeavour to profit by the opportunity. With the *entrée* of Vallombrosa and the good-will of the host, it is hard if I don't come to a

better understanding with the angry little beauty. That cursed Lord Harry, though, is in my way. But what of him! He is an idiot to begin with, and can easily be laid by the heels. There is no occasion, now, for my seeing Wimple; and as to Cutts's friend, Hinkin, he can stand over till I want him."

The dinner accordingly took place, and its result answered the expectations of each. Dr. Brocas felt satisfied that his guest was a very desirable *parti*, and Brunton fairly established himself in his host's good graces. Claribel's name was not mentioned, but in the course of conversation Brunton contrived, incidentally, to allude to Lord Harry FitzLupus, and, greatly to his satisfaction, he found that Dr. Brocas was not by any means well disposed towards him. It appeared that he had an old grudge against the Marquis of Wolverton, and the hostile feeling extended to all his race.

"Many years ago," said Dr. Brocas, "I knew that family well. There was but one member of it I ever liked—the only brother of the present peer. He, indeed, was my intimate friend at Oxford, and our friendship survived the University, though our tastes were very different. He was an ardent sportsman, fond of hunting, racing, and driving; I loved music, books, and pictures. He could only enjoy himself in England, I on the Continent; and so it happened that we were separated. While I was abroad things went wrong with him, and he got into disgrace with his brother, who treated him very harshly. For two or three years I lost sight of him altogether. At last he wrote me a letter; I was then at Rome—how well I remember the time—it was my first Carnival! He told me in that letter that circumstances had induced him to change his name; he did not say what it was, but he spoke of being married, and living obscurely; he closed the unsatisfactory account by asking me, for the sake of others besides himself, to endeavour to reconcile him to his brother. I wrote at once to the marquis, but received no answer.

; that my letter had miscarried, I wrote again; y application remained unnoticed. I made a ttempt, and to ensure its delivery the letter was a friend, who undertook to place it in Lord Wol- s own hands. He read it in the presence of my y, and what," said Dr. Brocas, pale with anger, recalled the occurrence—"what was his reply? g the letter deliberately in half, he threw it into e, and said: "In your next communication to Mr. , tell him that Frederick could not have chosen a advocate. It is to his pernicious intimacy I the course of life which has brought my poor r to his grave.' The vile, hypocritical slanderer! new that he had always hated me, and he knew

From that time, Mr. Brunton, Lord Wolverton have been strangers to each other. But we shall bly never have a chance of meeting again in this , for if the newspaper reports be true, his lordship paring for the long journey."

is information was doubly precious to Brunton. It d him that Lord Harry need not reckon on any ance from Dr. Brocas, and it also kept him away, st for a time, from Claribel.

t while the learned civilian was working thus tly for the supposed advantage of his *protégée*, he ot cease to indulge in his own fancies. It might been the habitual waywardness which led him so ly from one thing to another—perhaps his conver- with Brunton had awakened old reminiscences— vhat is as likely as anything else, the astonishing f his being in cash, a remittance on account of his vship having reached him—but on the morning Brunton's visit he drove to Brompton, intent on a idea.

e found Claribel at home with Mrs. Basset.

I am come," he said, "to carry you both away with to Hampshire."

th expressed their surprise at the announcement,

and both declared it was impossible they could go: Mrs. Basset was every day expecting the decision of the Court with respect to Mrs. Meggot's legacy, and Claribel said that her new part kept her a prisoner.

Dr. Brocas, however, would hear of no refusal. He had taken his resolution suddenly, and, therefore, he was the more pertinacious in adhering to it.

"What can it signify," he said to Mrs. Basset, "whether you know your fate a day sooner or later? If the cause is gained in your absence, it will be so much the pleasanter to meet with good news on your return; if it should go against you, why, you are spared so many hours' regret. As to you, Claribel, I will take no excuse. If you don't know your part, you shall study it on the hill-side, away from the smoke and dust of London; if you happen to be perfect, which I rather suspect is the case, there is no need to study it any more."

"But the rehearsals," urged Claribel, "you forget them."

"I will pay all fines," said Dr. Brocas. "See here!" he continued, gaily, as he drew forth a heavy purse and weighed it in his hand—he had cashed his cheque *en route*—"see here, my Bassetini! Enough to pay the national debt if it were necessary—to say nothing of all I owe myself. Enough to sweep out a hundred Mrs. Meggots from the memory; enough to satisfy the cupidity of all the managers in Europe."

Lest it should be supposed that the Oxford fellowships are on an equal footing with the see of Durham in its golden day, it may be as well to mention that the sum which now swelled the purse of Dr. Brocas was exactly fifty pounds. He might, with that money, have settled a number of small accounts which the Fulham tradesmen began to get rather tired of calling for, but he infinitely preferred spending it.

"These people," he said to Mrs. Turner, who represented the desirability of his satisfying the above-

tioned claims—"these people are illogical. If I were ıay them once I should never deal with them again: would, consequently, be enormous losers. Besides, are not true to themselves. If Bonedust the baker his bill, what becomes of Cleaver the butcher? If ts the greengrocer is satisfied, wherewith shall I ver the demand of Chalk the dairyman? No! I be just to all: they shall share and share alike."

To every one something, then, sir?" suggested Mrs. ıer.

What! would you have me compromise with the ıls for so many shillings in the pound, like a miserable :rupt? Perish the thought! But my Turnerini, ell you what I will do. Keep the money in my own :et. When it is gone, as go it must—for money eth itself wings—I shall be exactly where I was, and ill they, with this advantage, that no one can be ous of his neighbour."

r. Brocas could have argued for ever on this theme, he was eager to put his precepts into practice, and as assed through Fulham on his way into town, he gave rs to Crupper the jobmaster to have a carriage and in readiness at Vallombrosa at two o'clock to convey to the next railway station on the line he proposed avel. The distance was about six miles, but had een only one Dr. Brocas would not have stirred out two post-boys.

/hen once Claribel saw that her friend was resolved :arry his point, she made no more opposition, only ılating for time to write to Mr. Wimple, to tell him er intended absence for the next three days:—it was e no longer, and Sunday intervened.

ır. Brocas then explained himself in detail.

It is duty," he said, "which obliges me to take this ney—duty and a melancholy pleasure. When I ed with my property in Hampshire, I made a vow to ; it as often as I could, if not to salute the Penates—father's hearth, my Bassettini—to wander with the

Fauns and Dryads beneath my father's oaks—those that were not cut down! Who succeeded me at Broadstone I never asked or cared to know, but I think I have lately heard that some City banker is now the owner. We shall not seek his hospitality, Claribel. With this in our hands"—here he chinked his purse—"we shall find—as most people find—'our warmest welcome at an inn.' There is no enjoyment in the world like sitting at the window in the best room of a roadside inn. These places are a little altered now, perhaps, from what they were when I was young, but still the charm remains—

Quo semel est imbuta recens, servabit odorem
Testa diu——

which means, my Bassettini, that the cask, once filled, never loses the flavour of the wine."

"Did you say, Broadstone, doctor?" asked Mrs. Basset.

"I did," he replied.

"Broadstone, in Hampshire?"

"The same."

"I have been to Broadstone fair many a time when I was a girl. We lived only seven miles off. Clary was born down there."

"To think of that! Our excursion, then, becomes more of a duty than ever. We will visit your native place, Claribel! We will go to church there on Sunday,—listen to the moralising country parson, and draw our own moral from the country tombstones,—quaint and simple records of better people than ourselves."

"My father and mother, and three of my brothers, are buried in Longfield churchyard," said Mrs. Basset, with the air of a landed proprietor.

"My father, too, lies there!" sighed Claribel.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BROADSTONE REVISITED.

E bean-stalk in the nursery tale grew scarcely so
as the fortunes of Richard Brunton.

Jpon what principle his operations were based no one
ld guess, but the success with which they were
nded excited universal admiration. To deal largely
he grand feature of modern commercial enterprise;
ounts never dreamt of by the last race of merchants,
only reached as the sum total of a twelvemonth's
, are now the transactions of the hour; and balances
struck in millions, where, formerly, a tithe of the
iness which they represent sufficed.

)ur forefathers, when they wished to convey an
quate notion of the wealth of some City Crœsus of
r acquaintance, used, *ore rotundo*, to exclaim, "He's
th a Plum, sir!" The word has fallen into desuetude,
the sum it indicated is looked upon as a mere fleabite
hese piping times of commercial prosperity. Your
ltic" go-ahead men will make you a hundred
sand pounds in the twinkling of a market. How
they keep their gains is, indeed, another matter.

'oremost among the plum-gatherers of the day stood
hard Brunton. It was no longer a question between
and Mr. Ashley about a paltry bond for ten
sand: that liability had, perhaps, been merged in
r mutual transactions; or, like the sum which
nton had borrowed from his quondam fellow-clerk,
Julius Browser, when first he set up for himself, had
ained in his hands at an interest of more per cent.
the most flourishing Jamaica copper mine ever
ised.

In the phrase of the time, Richard Brunton was "The Millionaire" he had hoped to become: the term might be synonymous with Mushroom, but that signified little to Brunton if he could, by skilful management, make it the means of attaining the Oak's stability.

It is easy to make the assertion—but it is, nevertheless, as true, uttered off-hand, as if it had been pondered over for years—that the very wisest amongst us are always the first to be taken in.

Perhaps, if you had searched London all through, you could not have found a wiser-looking man, or one whose actions seemed to be so entirely under the guidance of wisdom, as Mr. Velters. Had a tear ever dimmed his eye on hearing a tale of distress—had a hand been at any time privately extended to help the unfortunate—had he ever unbuttoned his breeches-pocket except for a charity sermon, when all men saw what he gave, or a printed subscription-list, where everybody read the amount of his contribution? No person could accuse Mr. Velters of any such weakness. Surely, then, he must have been one of the very wisest! And yet he was deceived by Richard Brunton, or by the system of which "The Millionaire" was the exponent.

At the commencement of the patronage which Mr. Velters bestowed on Brunton, the seated statue of the Commandant of Seville might have envied him the stiffness of his manner; but as the scales began to turn towards an equality in wealth—or that which appeared to be so—an awkward flexibility, which resembled the same statue in motion, usurped the old rigidity. In asking Brunton to his country house again, Mr. Velters no longer condescendingly implied the honour he was conferring, but named it as a thing which the other had the power—if it so pleased him—to refuse.

"Can you come down to us at Broadstone, on Saturday, Mr. Brunton?" was the way in which Mr. Velters put the invitation—"you will find some old friends there who, I need hardly say, will be most happy to see you."

ıessing at once who the old friends were, Brunton not hesitate to accept the offer. No chance of ing Miss Travers was to be neglected—and what ɔe so promising as the friendly intercourse of country

But for this, he might have regretted that Mr. ɛrs should invite him to Broadstone at the very ent when the absence from London of Lord Harry Lupus might be turned to profitable account with bel; but then he reflected that the proposed visit d be of little more than four-and-twenty hours' dura- and that time might be easily spared when such a t as he hoped for was possible. It is true, there was in his way the difficulty of Margaret Nalders. How he to set one aside and engross the other; how ɛate those who were always together? It must be , however, and at last he hit upon the manner of g it.

requent intercourse with Margaret, in which the confidential subjects were discussed had told him all history. Isolated as she seemed—except in her ɛhment to Alice—there was still one tie that bound to her own family. This was an uncle, a brother of father, into whose house, when an orphan child, garet had been taken, and with whom she had passed early life till accident introduced her to the notice of Temple Travers. Mr. Gabriel Nalders was a poor ı, or he would scarcely have suffered his niece to e him, but the opening was so good that he made a ifice of his feelings and consented that they should . But, though the separation took place, mutual ɛtion remained. At intervals they corresponded, once ɛwice they met, and at all times Margaret cherished recollection of her kind old uncle in Yorkshire. It upon this foundation that Brunton built the artifice letermined to employ.

An hour before the time he had settled with Mr. ters for accompanying him to Broadstone, he went to elegraph office, where his person was unknown, and ɔte the following despatch:

"Miss Nalders. Your uncle is taken dangerously ill. He expresses the strongest desire to see you immediately. Pray lose no time. It is feared that he may not survive the night."

A false name and address were subscribed by the sender of this message, the wires were immediately set in motion, and about the same moment that Brunton and Mr. Velters left the London railway station a special train started from Broadstone with Margaret.

"She cannot learn the truth," thought Brunton, "till to-morrow; she can never find out who sent her on this wild-goose chase; she must be absent all the time I mean to stay at Broadstone."

You have a great many irons in the fire, Mr. Brunton. Will none of them burn your fingers?

Not at present, it seems, for your *ruse* has been successful. The table is clear; make your game—and play it out!

Mrs. Velters was loud in lamentation when, on reaching the hall, she informed her husband of the sudden departure of Miss Nalders, though, in point of fact, she was far more pleased than sorry: an educated woman the less giving her a better opportunity of parading her fragmentary acquirements. To dig them into a few passive objects was what she generally aimed at, but she had no objection to a little timid contradiction, for then, in her happy dictatorial way, she improved her previous triumph.

A larger party was assembled now than on the occasion of Brunton's former visit, and this circumstance favoured his schemes. Though a good deal *obsédé* by his hostess, who shared her husband's reverence for the *millionaire* principle, he was able in the course of the evening to detach himself from the crowd and engage the exclusive attention of Alice Travers.

At first he naturally spoke of Margaret, and expressed his [illegible] at the cause which had deprived them of [illegible]ating on her estimable qualities in so

manner, that Alice might well be excused if she
the belief—long hoped for by her—that
:t's regard for Brunton was returned by him.
d been true to her promise; she had never
l a syllable to her friend on the subject of her en-
ıt; but there was something in Margaret's
when she praised Richard Brunton to Alice,
:onvinced the heiress that it meant more than
ı advocacy. Her own opinion of Brunton was
gh, and she listened to his words with pleased
n.

d with considerable talents and many agreeable
s, Brunton exerted himself to the utmost to con-
ıe favourable impression which he knew had
been prepared. He was careful to adapt his
:nts to the tone of Alice's mind, and when he
that there was complete harmony of thought
n them he ventured to speak of himself alone. He
tle of his past career, beyond a vague allusion to
une and unassisted struggles, but it was enough to
an interest in the events of his early life; the
l acknowledgments which he expressed with
; to his present position, arrived at solely through
ndness of those whom, he averred, he most
:ed and respected, could not fail to gratify her
he addressed; and when this tribute had been
and he described his prospects with so much
tion, and pictured everything to come in such
colours, referring to personal considerations with
ch humility and apparent disinterestedness—as if
d purer and loftier views than any which self-
ıdisement could possibly offer—that pleasure
ed in the eyes of Alice Travers as she thought of
ıppiness which seemed to be in store for her friend:
, too, escaped her when she contrasted her own un-
n hopes with those of Margaret.

e gleam of pleasure and the shade of sorrow were
:d alike by Brunton, who set them both down to

the same account—but he was content on this occasion only to break ground. From the estimate which he had formed of the character of Miss Travers he feared to be too precipitate, while at the same time he felt that now was the golden opportunity which never might present itself again.

"To-morrow, then, to-morrow," he said to himself, when the party broke up—"to-morrow must decide the question."

But he had a good deal to occupy him before he slept that night. As he sat at his bedroom-window, with his eyes fixed on the lake, whose surface, stirred by a gentle air, glistened in the moonlight like scales of silver, he thought of the trusting woman whom he had rescued from its waters, of the love which she bore him, of the duplicity he had practised, and of the deeper treachery which he still meditated.

But though his conscience set before him all the wrong he had done to Margaret and was yet to do, like Alp the renegade "his heart within him was not changed."

In the calm serenity of that hour he mustered his resolution to carry out to its full extent the long-cherished purpose of his soul.

Let him only obtain from Alice an avowal of her affection, and all he desired was gained. He would urge her to a secret and instant marriage, and then Margaret and the world, if her story were ever known, might say and do their worst.

What chance was there of realising this hope?

The best, as he judged. That girl, before every on else so passionless, had listened to him with an emotio which, if she strove to do so, she could not disguis Her smile and her sigh, he said again, were susceptibl of only one interpretation. If once she acknowledged that she loved him, her love—the stronger from her natural pride and coldness—would pause at nothing he might propose, would forgive anything he might have done to obtain it.

. he dwell on such a theme as this without
; of Claribel?
ıst her he was planning a darker scheme of guilt,
ıcience here was stifled by passion. Let every-
ıape itself as it might, his, he determined, she
be. That was the immovable thought which no
'ation affected. Whether he succeeded in marry-
:e Travers or not—whether Margaret died of a
heart, or marred his fortunes by her resentment
at least, was his resolve: that Claribel should
ıis triumph or console his failure.

—o—

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW BRUNTON PROSPERED WITH THE HEIRESS.

.o may be ruffled by a gnat; the temper of a saint
oft-quoted rarity—may be disturbed by a very
ınnoyance; and the best of us—whether saints or
—may, like Imogen, be "sprighted by a fool"—
:ed, "angered worse."
h all her fossilised accomplishments, Mrs. Velters
ıt quite "forgot herself to stone."
moral *carapace* of that lady—to use a term which
:rself would have employed—was almost as hard
husband's, or that of one of her own favourite
ıes; but there was one joint in her armour through
she might be pierced.
: was accessible to self-interest.
:nce had not so entirely absorbed her every faculty
ıhut out all worldly considerations.
. Velters was rich, and when he died—a possible
which she contemplated with great equanimity—

he would leave a very large fortune to his family: of that there could be no doubt.

But if he had been the Bank of England itself, the colossal idol before which he daily bent the knee, his fortune was divisible; and to the mathematical mind of Mrs. Velters every part suggested the whole.

Mr. and Mrs. Velters had several sons, but only one of them had yet been launched upon the world—the eldest, a travelling, yachting man, with a large and certain income being *hors de cause*, as—for the present—were boys at school. The excepted youth was the darling of his mother; the darling to this extent—she thought about him more than all the rest, and for a very satisfactory reason.

Albert Velters was in his twenty-first year, and therefore marriageable. Miss Alice Travers was a frequent guest at Broadstone; she, too, was marriageable —very marriageable. A match, then, was possible, and, besides being possible, it was, to Mrs. Velters's thinking, in the highest degree desirable. The programme was simple and not ineffective, and Mrs. Velters resolved to do her best to carry it out effectively.

Although Albert Velters was a common-place gentleman as you could expect to meet with on a long summer's day—although his face was insipid and his mind a blank —his opinion of himself was first-rate. Consequently, when his mother suggested the heiress, he looked upon the suggestion as all but a *fait accompli*.

Mrs. Velters was no sharer in her son's fatuity; she knew that Alice was not to be easily won, and that throwing the handkerchief was not the way to win her. To keep her darling Albert up to the mark was, therefore, her constant endeavour.

Though surrounded by a crowd of obsequious listeners, and engaged in the arduous demonstration of squaring the circle, or dogmatising on some equally pleasing impossibility, it had not escaped the notice of Mrs. Velters that Brunton and Alice Travers, on the evening

of their long conversation, were absent from the throng, and casting a quick glance round the room, she perceived how they were occupied. Making a mental memorandum of this fact, on the following morning she administered a lecture to her son, which had the effect of stimulating him to a more decided course of action. Mrs. Velters did not absolutely say that Mr. Brunton was to be watched—she did not, indeed, suspect him—but she gave her darling to understand that, if he relaxed in his attentions, some one else might step in and gain the prize he coveted.

Had this hint been proffered by another, a self-satisfied pooh-pooh would have been the rejoinder, but Albert Velters held his scientific mother in the greatest possible awe, and promised implicit obedience, and for that day, at least, he was as good as his word.

He sat beside Miss Travers at breakfast, he was her companion in the conservatory, he went in the same carriage with her to church, he filled the only male corner of the family pew, he offered her his arm when they went to luncheon, and behaved altogether so uncommonly like her shadow, that Brunton began to despair of securing to himself the half hour on which he had calculated.

It angered him sorely that Alice should, in this unforseen manner, be sprighted by this fool, for he had very soon taken the measure of Albert Velters's capacity.

It was not him, however, that he feared, but his importunity, and how to get rid of that Brunton could not tell.

Within a few miles of Broadstone, on the skirts of Mr Velters's large estate, there stood the remains of an ancient abbey. It was an extensive and well-preserved ruin, and was, indeed, the lion of that part of the country.

At dinner, on the day before, one of the party accidentally spoke of Saint Cuthbert's, and Mrs. Velters immediately bursting forth into an elaborate descriptio-

of the Abbey—which included a dissertation on every known style of ecclesiastical architecture—Brunton expressed a wish to see the spot. The Sunday qualms of Mr. Velters being of a kind that subsided before a Millionaire's desire, and Miss Travers having said besides that Saint Cuthbert's was her favourite haunt, it was agreed to drive there on the following afternoon.

Brunton had this excursion in view as likely to afford him the opportunity he desired of being quite alone with Alice Travers—and here was this intrusive Albert Velters apparently bent on monopolising her for the whole of the time he was likely to remain at Broadstone. Should he quarrel with him or swear an eternal friendship? Quarrelling, under the circumstances, was impossible: he must adopt the amicable alternative.

In considering which was the weakest amongst the many weak points of the young gentleman, Brunton recollected that he had dwelt with much emphasis, over his wine, on his knowledge of horseflesh, leaving it to be inferred, if he did not actually say as much, that he, Albert Velters, was the best judge of a horse and about the finest rider in England. There was nothing he had not done in the way of equestrianism short of leaping through a hoop at Astley's—and there really was nothing that lay within the scope of a horse's capabilities which his chesnut mare could not accomplish.

Two ways offered for approaching this question: Brunton must either meet Mr. Albert Velters on equal grounds, and so establish the usual freemasonry, or he must at once admit his own inferiority in the noble science in which the other excelled. Though he might have adopted the first of these two courses, for he was, in fact, an excellent horseman, he unhesitatingly chose the second.

Taking advantage of the interval while the ladies had gone to put on their cloaks and bonnets, Brunton smilingly addressed the vain-glorious youth.

"Do you know," he observed, "you quite excited

my curiosity last night by what you said about your chesnut mare. She must be a splendid creature !"

"There's not such another in the kingdom," returned Mr Albert Velters. "Are you fond of horses ?"

"Passionately !" said Brunton.

"What hounds do you hunt with ? The Queen's, or Rothschild's, or whose ?"

"I don't hunt at all," replied Brunton.

"Not hunt ! What's the use of a horse if you don't hunt him ? But I suppose you're one of the regular Rotten Row men !"

No," said Brunton, quietly, "I don't even ride."

"You astonish me. I can't comprehend ——"

"To tell you the truth, Mr Albert—I don't mind mentioning it to you, but I shouldn't like it, of course, o go any further, but I—the fact is—I'm not a very ood rider."

"Oh !" exclaimed young Mr. Velters, in a tone bor-ering on contempt. "Not a good rider, eh ? I don't e what a man's fit for if he can't ride "

"Not much, I believe," said Brunton, meekly ; "that s often struck me. Do you know, I'd give anything ride, as you do, now. When I was some years unger—mind, this is quite between onrselves—I tried conquer the difficulty. A friend sent me a horse to ere I was staying. I was to go over to breakfast, and n the meet afterwards. The distance was only two les, and what do you think happened ?"

"Heaven knows ! Perhaps the brute ran away with ı ?"

'I fell off sixteen times ! Every time the creature into a trot, over I went."

Mr. Albert Velters screeched with laughter. Brunton ught he never would have stopped. At last, with s in his eyes, and ready to break out again, he laimed,

By Jove ! that beats all I ever heard. Sixteen times wo miles ! How did you manage to mount again ?"

"Oh, that was easily done, for the moment I fell the horse stood still. He was very quiet."

"I should say so!" cried Albert, still laughing. "I suppose, then," he continued, "you never tried again?"

"You are quite right, Mr. Albert," said Brunton, "I never did. But for all that, incapable as I am of showing off, like others, there's nothing in the world I delight in so much as seeing good riding."

"By Jove!" said the young man, falling at once into Brunton's trap, "you shall see me on the chesnut mare!"

"Oh, would you! When?"

Mr. Albert Velters paused an instant, remembering his mamma's injunction.

Brunton took advantage of the pause to say,

"I knew you were a first-rate horseman. I heard Miss Travers say so."

"Did she?" exclaimed the idiot. "Did she, though?"

Brunton assured him it was a fact.

Mr Albert Velters jumped up and rang the bell: a footman entered.

"Tell Maggs to saddle the chesnut. I ride. You'll have a good view of me from the box. I advise you to go there, Mr. Brunton."

"Ca dépend," said Brunton to himself; "let me see you in the saddle first."

Round came the chesnut: a hot-tempered animal, with a wild eye.

"There's a beauty!" said Mr. Albert Velters, admiringly, as the groom brought her up.

"A beauty indeed!" echoed Brunton.

"And you really wouldn't like to try her? Ha! ha! ha! You won't venture?"

"Not for anything you could offer. But, mum!"

"Oh, never fear! I'll not peach. See me, now!"

"She's a little fresh to-day, Mr. Albert," said the

groom, in the under tone peculiar to his class. "You'll have to humour her a bit."

"When was she out last?" asked young Mr. Velters.

"The day afore yesterday, sir," said Maggs.

Some slight abatement of confidence was perceptible in the manner of Mr. Albert Velters on hearing this reply, but it was too late to retract. He had bragged of his mare, had bragged of his riding, and was bound to do his *devoir*.

Brunton smiled inwardly at the change, but preserved an inflexible countenance.

Mr. Albert Velters walked round the chesnut, looked at the set of the saddle, examined the stirrup-leathers, fiddled with the curb-chain, and performed sundry other manœuvres indicative of knowing what he was about —manœuvres intended to overwhelm the ignorant Brunton—then finally patting her on the neck, and saying, "Soho, mare! steady!" he mounted.

He had hardly performed this feat when the carriage which was to take the party to the Abbey drew up in front of the portico, and the ladies made their appearance.

"Why, Albert!" exclaimed Mrs. Velters, on beholding her son, "how is this? Are you not going with us?"

"Oh yes, ma!" he answered, "only I thought if I rode there would be more room in the carriage. I mean," he added, with a triumphant air—and his glance took in both Alice and Brunton—"I mean to show you the way."

Mrs. Velters was vexed, but did not let the cause of her vexation appear. She laid it on the chesnut.

"I don't like to see you on that creature," she said, It's too spirited for you, Albert"

This was a heavy blow to the young man's vanity, and the heavier because the remark was true. *Au fond*, Mr. Albert Velters was something of a coward: after the fashion of Parolles. His tongue was too foolhardy; it prattled him into perils.

He coloured up at the imputation.

"Spirited!" he said, "I'll soon take the spirit out of her;" and giving the mare her head, but not too much of it, he cantered off.

This was sufficient for Brunton. He cared to see no more of Mr. Albert's horsemanship, and followed the ladies into the carriage, taking his seat opposite Miss Travers. Mr. Snowball and Mr. Lamley, two very mild young gentlemen, who happened to be guests at Broadstone, went in the rumble. Mr. Velters remained behind, occupied, according to custom, with the "History of Banking."

For the first three or four miles no incident occurred to disturb the general conversation, the part which Mrs. Velters took in it being rather less spiced with science than usual, for every now and then a natural anxiety led her to watch the motions of the chesnut.

From time to time Mr. Albert Velters came capering up beside the carriage, exhibiting all the paces of his equestrian style, and for the space above mentioned all went well with him. By degrees, however, the hot temper of the mare began to get the better of her, and she chafed at the frequent checks of her rider, as if, sooner or later, she meant to have a battle with him. The motive for the struggle at last occurred.

They had traversed the park and left it by a gate which opened out upon a common that skirted the park palings for some distance. The road took a long curve, and Mr. Albert Velters proposed to exhibit on the intervening open ground, rejoining the carriage at a certain point. He had completed about half the distance when Mrs. Velters uttered a loud exclamation.

"In the name of goodness what is the matter with Albert?"

The question was easily answered. The chesnut, in crossing the common, put her foot in a deep rut, and very nearly went down. Pulled up with a sudden jerk, she reared, and off went her rider's hat. It did not, however,

reach the ground, for "an elastic" confined it at the wearer's button-hole, but being elastic, it made the hat do worse; the bobstay lengthened with every plunge, and the hat, swinging about, caught the mare's wild eye and added to her uneasiness; at last it got between her legs, and then—as the Scotch say—she was neither to hold nor to bind. After one desperate plunge, she got the bit between her teeth, and the last thing Mrs. Velters saw was the mare having it all her own way, and the intrepid but hatless Albert the slave of her ungovernable will, both disappearing in the distance.

Her maternal apprehensions were expressed in every possible form, and it was some time before Brunton could calm her, but he finally succeeded by declaring his firm conviction that no harm could happen to the finest rider in England, and Mrs. Velters's nerves regained their wonted composure. The diaphanous Arabella gave way to no feminine emotion, an incipient flirtation having sprung up between her and the mildest of the two young gentlemen in the rumble. She merely exclaimed, "Oh, dear," and once more fixed her eyes on the pale blue orbs of Mr. Lamley.

"At any rate," muttered Brunton, "that ass is got rid of."

In another half-hour they reached the ruins of Saint Cuthbert.

Mrs. Velters could make no decent pretext for securing Brunton as her escort, her arm having been intercepted by Mr. Snowball, who, as the representative of the house of Snowball and Lamley, the brokers of Mr. Velters, could pay no greater respect to that chieftain's lady. Arabella and the gentle Mr. Lamley paired off, as a matter of course, and Brunton, released at length from the tumult of hope and fear, had the privilege of conducting Miss Travers.

At first the party kept tolerably well together; but as Mrs. Velters, planted in the centre of the aisle, settled down to her subject, and, oblivious of her son, became

more and more intent on victimising the complacent Snowball, her listeners drew off to the rest of the ruin.

I am sorry to say so, but it is the fact that Miss Arabella Velters whispered a game of hide-and-seek in the Chapter House to Mr Robert Lamley, and they stole away to carry out their innocent design.

Alice Travers, who loved the picturesque of architecture far more than its pedantry, and who constituted herself, in some sort, the *cicerone* of the ruin, proposed to show Brunton the cloisters, and so it happened that Mr. Snowball was left sole auditor of the learned Mrs. Velters.

How she punished him! Except that he was one of those persons—a sort of moral sandbag—who can stand any amount of punishment.

But still, how she gave it him!

The Anglo-Norman character,—the Early-English,—the Perpendicular,—the Transition Period,—the Ornamented,—the Decorated Gothic,—the Flamboyant,—the Florid,—nothing of style was left untouched; and shoal upon shoal came mullions and billet-mouldings,—corbels and capitals,—trefoils and lancets,—finals and pinnacles,—clerestories and flying buttresses,—till good Mr. Snowball, with the very strongest wish to maintain his own identity, began to doubt at last whether that was his own head which grinned at him from under one of the corbel tables in front of which he was standing, or whether it really still stood on his shoulders.

Leaving this question in doubt—for, after all, it is a matter of very little consequence—we will follow Miss Travers and Richard Brunton.

A low doorway covered with ivy led from the south transept of the building into the nearly perfect cloisters. They were perfect—in ruin—on three sides, at least, but on the fourth the wall was dismantled, the arches had fallen, and there the foliage, which forced its way through every cleft and rent, grew most luxuriant. Beside some heavy fragments of stone—the wreck of a broken archi-

trave—a fine ash-tree had taken root and threw a broad but flickering shade.

After a curious examination of many beautiful objects, Alice Travers and Brunton reached this spot, the remotest from the main building.

She sat down upon one of the sculptured stones, while Brunton stood, leaning against the tree.

There was silence for a few moments, and, perhaps, for the first time in his life, he trembled.

At length he spoke, but his voice was unusually subdued.

"Miss Travers," he said, "there are places which call up feelings whose existence—if not unknown to us—forces itself upon our consciousness with all the effect of a new discovery."

"Poor Margaret!" said Alice, "I wish she were here."

"You did not hear me, Miss Travers," pursued Brunton.

"Oh yes! I heard you, Mr. Brunton," replied Alice, "and at once I thought of our absent friend. What pleasure she would have felt had she been at Broadstone to-day!"

"No doubt, Miss Travers, it is always her pleasure to be near you."

"That," returned Alice, "was not exactly my meaning. Do you think she could look upon the water which we passed not an hour ago, without remembering that it was the scene of the most eventful moment of her life? Oh no! Margaret has too much gratitude. Her sensibility is too profound."

"Her estimable qualities, Miss Travers, none can appreciate more highly than myself. I pay tribute to them every hour."

"And believe me," said Alice, who had a long-prepared project in her mind—"believe me, Mr. Brunton, that Margaret is worthy of the highest thoughts. I know her tenderness, her devotion, the sacrifices which

she is capable of making; and I also know the earnest sincerity of her friendship."

Brunton mused for an instant.

"Can Alice suspect that Margaret loves me? But, even so, those allusions lead to something further."

Then, speaking aloud, he said:

"You confirm everything I have dared to hope. You release me, Miss Travers, from the most torturing fear. If Margaret had pleaded—and not pleaded in vain—this world has nothing more to offer!"

"You love her, then!" said Alice, eagerly. "Oh, Heaven!"

"Love her, Miss Travers, love her! Next to yourself, it is Margaret Nalders I have to thank for all the happiness I enjoy. But love her! Oh! Alice, it is you, you only that I love!"

And he threw himself at her feet.

Alice started—a mortal chillness came over her, and she stood up, pale as death.

"Mr. Brunton," she said, "you forget yourself! You forget who I am! You forget who you are!"

"No!" he cried, still kneeling, with clasped hands. "No, Alice! I forget nothing. I know my own unworthiness. I feel that you are far, far above me! But it cannot be scorn that prompts your words;—they are the utterance—yes, Alice, it must be so—the timid utterance of new-born passion. If Margaret has sacrificed herself, for whom that sacrifice? For whom but Alice Travers, the beloved of Richard Brunton."

Alice gasped with astonishment: her voice nearly failed her, but she made a supreme effort, and spoke.

"Mr. Brunton," she said, "You have deceived—*I am sure of it*—deceived *more than one!* Do not deceive yourself. The husband of Margaret would have been my friend. Now, Sir, you are nothing to me but the drudge you were when first I saw you!"

Brunton had a bitter answer on his lips, but before it

could frame itself into speech, a strange interruption took place.

Crashing through the boughs and stumbling over the stones, Mr Albert Velters stood before them. The runaway chesnut had been stopped about half a mile from Saint Cuthbert's; her rider had returned on foot; and a countrymen now held the horse at the Abbey gate.

Neither Alice nor Brunton could tell how much or how little Mr Albert Velters might have seen or heard of the scene which had just been enacted.

Miss Travers took her course at once.

"Give me your arm, Albert," she said; "I wish to join your mother. We shall find her in the aisle."

They walked away, and Brunton slowly followed.

But he did not remain with the group.

"Mrs. Velters," he said, "will pardon me, if I return to Broadstone before her. The sudden recollection of a despatch of the gravest importance which ought to have been sent away this morning, must be my excuse for leaving her. Mr. Albert, I will borrow your horse; you can take my seat in the carriage. Miss Travers—farewell!"

He bent upon her a glance, the meaning of which none there could have interpreted, and then walked swiftly from the Abbey.

"Stop! stop!" cried Albert Velters—"stop, my good fellow, you forget you can't ride. You will be thrown as sure as fate!"

Brunton never turned his head. A few moments afterwards, through one of the windows of the ruin, Albert Velters saw Brunton go by.

"Can't he ride, though!" he shouted. "He'll break the mare's heart!"

Away Brunton went. He mistook the turning that led into Broadstone Park, and kept straight along the Queen's highway.

Three miles further on he passed a large old-fashioned roadside inn.

An elderly gentleman and a young lady were sitting at a large bay-window, and seeing a horseman approach at full gallop, looked curiously forth.

Brunton also looked up as he passed.

Could he have been dreaming? Was that the face of Claribel?

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CHAPTER XXXI.

A DISCOVERY.

THE Millionaire had not been mistaken: it was, indeed, Claribel whom he had seen.

In pursuance of his intention, with his purse so uneasily full, Dr. Brocas had brought his *protégée* and Mrs. Basset into the country; and before we follow Brunton further, we must speak of what had befallen them since their arrival.

The first care of Dr. Brocas was to establish himself after his heart's desire, and for this purpose he had chosen The Wheatsheaf, a well-known house, within a few miles of Broadstone, famous in its day for the carp and tench in its garden-pond, famous for the mushroomed spatchcocks which hungry mail-coach travellers had only time to pay for—had certainly no time to eat—famous for the cobwebbed claret which only saw the light on very rare occasions, famous for the roses that clustered above its porch, famous, in short, for all that makes a country inn agreeable.

The Wheatsheaf had been a favourite place of resort in the springtide of Dr. Brocas's youth, and the wonder was—amid all the changes which had come over the world since then—that it still existed in its old capacity.

Altogether unchanged it assuredly was not—time, a different proprietor, and a new era, contributing each

their share of alteration—but enough of its original condition remained to justify its former reputation for good entertainment, when the landlord chose to afford it.

To Dr. Brocas nothing could be denied. He had such a magnificent way of ordering things—courting expense in every form—that the hotel-keepers wherever he went—unless he remained with them too long—absolutely worshipped him. He deserved to be the despot of the London Tavern, with only waiters for his subjects.

It was early when the travellers reached The Wheatsheaf, and, with nearly the whole day before them, Dr. Brocas at once proposed a drive, that he might show the country to his friends. As soon, therefore, as he had given instructions for "a quiet little dinner"—which included every luxury the house could supply—the party set out.

The weather was beautiful, the scenery charming, and Dr. Brocas in excellent spirits. In proposing the visit to Hampshire, he had spoken of it as "a melancholy pleasure;" but whatever of melancholy there might be in his mood, as he surveyed the property that had once been his own, he contrived to disguise it entirely from the observation of his companions. Like a schoolboy let loose, he made merry with all he saw, indulging in many witticisms at the expense of the present owner of Broadstone, whom he pictured as a *nouveau riche* under every conceivable aspect of ridicule—an easy and congenial way of consoling himself for the loss of a large estate.

As long as they skirted his patrimonial domain, the gaiety of Dr. Brocas flowed on without interruption, but the mirthful vein was altered when, after leaving Broadstone a mile or two behind, they reached the summit of a long hill, and, across a broad expanse of downs, another object came in view.

It was a large, castellated building, environed by dark wood, which stood upon a distant height.

"What fine place is that?" asked Claribel. "It must belong to some great personage, for there is a large flag flying, as large as that on the Keep at Windsor."

"Oh, stop!" cried Mrs. Basset. "Do let us see it!"

So the carriage stopped.

The countenance of Dr. Brocas, which a moment before had been as bright as day, suddenly changed to the gloom of night.

Claribel repeated her question.

"It is called Wolverton Castle," said Dr. Brocas.

"And who lives there?" continued Claribel.

"The Marquis of Wolverton," returned Dr. Brocas. aa laconically as before.

"The Marquis of Wolverton!" exclaimed Mrs. Basset. "Why, he's the father, Clary, of your friend Lord Harry FitzLupus. What a rich man he must be! How I should like to be he!"

"What can be the reason of that?" said Claribel, whose eye had been steadfastly fixed on the castle ever since she first saw it.

"Of what? inquired Dr. Brocas.

"Why, the large flag has been suddenly lowered. I see nothing now but the bare pole."

Dr. Brocas started.

"Perhaps he has just gone out," suggested Mrs. Basset.

"Very likely," observed Dr. Brocas, quietly—"gone out—never to come back again."

"What do you mean, Dr. Brocas?" said Claribel, turning towards him.

"I mean," he replied, "Lord Wolverton is dead! He has been dangerously ill—dying for this month past—he could not leave the house, even in a carriage; it is broad daylight; he must be dead. He may have died while we were gazing here! Strange!"

"It is shocking to think of," said Claribel. "In the midst of all this sunshine!" What a contrast to the

sick man's darkened chamber! Poor Lord Harry! He must be sorry for his father!"

"He was not a good father," said Dr. Brocas; "he was not a good man. But he is gone to his account, and I have no more to say."

"Did you know him, then, sir!" asked Claribel.

"Only too well," returned Dr. Brocas. "Say nothing more about him."

The carriage moved on, and Dr. Brocas relapsed into silence; Claribel remained silent also; but Mrs. Basset, whose sensibilities had never been very acute, soliloquised with somewhat blunted sympathy.

"How very odd he should have popped off just as we stopped to look! I wonder what Lord Harry will come in for!"

On these two strings Mrs. Basset played the same tune a great many times over, while neither of her companions spoke. Claribel was anxiously observing Dr. Brocas, who seemed absorbed in the deepest thought.

After an interval of some minutes the latter abruptly asked the driver "if he knew Clearwell?"

"The gentleman meant the little village just under Wolverton woods? Oh, yes, he knew it very well, but the road was a precious bad one; few things besides carts ever went that way: it stood quite lonely."

"Drive there," said Dr. Brocas. "At least, get as near it with the carriage as you can."

The man touched his hat, gave a sigh to the probable fate of his springs, and favoured the horse he liked least with an extra allowance of whip-cord.

At the end of half an hour he pointed to a track that led off the downs, and remarking that Clearwell "lay up there," appeared to wait for a renewal of the order before he obeyed it; but at a signal from Dr. Brocas he turned off the turnpike.

He had not wantonly disparaged the road. It was as bad as it well could be. Deep ruts formed by the winter rains, loose flints detached from the chalky banks, and a

steep and snaky ascent, assorted ill with the driver's macadamised experiences. After a time, however, when it gained the level turf, the track got better, and so it continued till it dipped again, and then it became as rough as before. This alternation lasted for a mile or more, but at last the driver declared the way was no longer "fit for a four-wheel carriage," and that "his hosses couldn't do it," so at a point where a shallow stream came gurgling past, and a clump of fir-trees cast a broad shadow across the road, Dr. Brocas ordered him to stop: he would walk the rest of the distance.

"Is it something very pretty that you are going to show us?" inquired Mrs. Basset. "It ought to be, after all this jolting."

"It is possible," said Dr. Brocas, "that you may not care to see the place. It is only an old cottage."

"In that case," returned Mrs Basset, "I would rather stay here in the shade. Old cottages are no great fancy of mine. You and Clary can walk up the hill while I *set* still in the carriage."

Claribel looked at Dr. Brocas: he offered no objection, and she quietly took his arm.

"Something oppresses you," she said, when they had proceeded a short distance. "You have not been yourself since you spoke of Lord Wolverton's death."

"You are right," he answered, pressing Claribel's hand. "I am suffering—more than I have suffered for years. Some one lived, some one died, near the spot where we now stand, whose memory awakens all the grief I ever knew."

"Lord Wolverton?" timidly asked Claribel.

"He is the cause, but not the object of my sorrow. It is for the sake of another that I mourn. There—there," he cried, waving his hand, "all that my heart held dear lies buried."

Claribel followed with her eyes the direction in which Dr. Brocas pointed, and perceived—half hidden by trees —the twisted chimneys and carved gable of a prettily

mented cottage. They advanced towards it, and ough that air of desolation pervaded it which never to characterise a place wholly unoccupied. the neatly garden testified to some kind of superintendence. Brocas made no attempt to enter, but passed on, till turn of the road a group of commoner dwellings e in sight.

Here," he said, "the person lives who keeps the key ne outer gate; the other," he added, taking one from east-pocket, "I never part with."

respectable woman appeared at his summons, and vered the few brief questions which he put to her. y related solely to the exterior of the cottage, which under her husband's care.

You will bear with me for an hour," said Dr. Brocas, ressing Claribel. "It is three years since I was last Clearwell. I must visit HER house *alone*. Where you stay? Here, or with your aunt?"

Aunt Basset," she replied, with a smile, "is fast ep, I am sure, before this. The village is so charm- I will wander about in the open air."

he gardener's wife, whose eyes had been constantly d on Claribel's face, and who evidently knew Dr. cas's habit, offered the use of her parlour.

It is not fit for a lady like you, Miss, but I can ly say it is clean."

Claribel thanked her for her kindness, but declined it, in alleging her desire to see the village.

In an hour, then," said Dr. Brocas, "I will be with again. Farewell!"

He turned and slowly walked back, and Claribel was alone.

The stream which she had crossed on leaving the riage, and which flowed from a spring that gave its ne to the village, invited her by its murmurs, and she sued its upward course until she reached the source, ere its waters, before they escaped, filled a rude basin stone that had been placed to confine them for use.

The walk ended at this spot—a high bank, surmounted by a moss-covered park paling, above which waved the foliage of a belt of young beech and aspen, stopping all further progress in that direction. The place seemed meant for repose, and by the brink of the well Claribel sat down.

Her thoughts were of Dr. Brocas. She pondered over the remarkable change in his manner, dwelt on the half-uttered confession of his early love, and called to mind the words he had spoken in relation to Lord Wolverton.

"Why," she asked herself, "should an ancient feud with a person whom I never knew cause me a feeling of more than common pain? It is true, he was Lord Harry's father. But what, except as a friend, is Lord Harry to me?"

There was a slight noise as of broken branches, and Claribel raised her head. As she looked up, her eyes met those of Lord Harry FitzLupus himself. He was leaning over the park paling, apparently in quest of an easy place to descend.

His surprise on seeing Claribel was as great as hers.

"Gracious Heaven!" he exclaimed. "You! In this place—at this moment!"

He was by her side before he had done speaking. He looked pale, and seemed deeply agitated.

"Can it indeed be you?" were the words with which he renewed his greeting.

"It is singular enough," said Claribel, "that we should meet in this manner. I fear, too, in the hour of distress!"

Lord Harry covered his face with his hands. Presently he spoke again.

"You are right," he said. "I have just lost my father. But how came you to know it? It is barely an hour since he died! I have been wandering about I scarcely know where, since then!"

"We passed within sight of the castle when the flag

was suddenly lowered, and Dr. Brocas, who was with us, said it could be for no other reason."

"Dr. Brocas! Another strange coincident! The last moments of my father's life had reference to Dr. Brocas—and to yourself."

"How to me?" asked Claribel, in wonder.

"Claribel!—forgive me if I call you by that name—Claribel, you are my own cousin. Your father was my uncle—my father's only brother!"

Claribel was overwhelmed with astonishment.

"Can this be true?" she said. "Surely you would not jest with me—deceive me—at such a time—at any!"

"It is as true," replied Lord Harry, with solemn emphasis—"as true as the word of God! I have seen your mother's letter in which she entreated my father to protect his brother's child; I have heard from my father's lips his acknowledgment of her claim, his admission of the cruelty he had inflicted; I have received his dying commands to find you out—you, whom he little thought I had known so long. Lord Wolverton has atoned, as far as man may, for the injustice of which you were the victim."

Lord Harry had never been so eloquent before, but his heart was on his lips—and that heart was, after all, in the right place. The affectation and folly of an unoccupied life had long been swept away before the pure love which he felt for Claribel.

"I will believe what you say," she made answer, "for I have never had cause to doubt you. Yet the things you tell me are so astounding! I can scarcely think I am not dreaming."

"It will be a golden dream, Claribel," said Lord Harry, with a mournful smile. "But," he continued, hastily, as if endeavouring to shake off a painful thought, "you spoke of being with Dr. Brocas. Is he staying in this neighbourhood?"

"No farther off," replied Claribel, "than the cottage

which stands yonder. An old attachment brought him to this place—one which had some, but I know not what, connexion with Lord Wolverton."

"Of that, too, I have to speak. Besides being your father's dearest friend, and slighted on that account, Dr. Brocas had received a wrong at my father's hands which many men avenge in blood. A woman's fame traduced, and a woman's broken heart, were recollections that added to his remorse. But," continued Lord Harry, with emotion, "he repented him of all his sins, and as he looked for forgiveness above, he prayed for it also on earth."

"Mine," said Claribel, in tears, "is not needed; but I offer it for my mother's and for my father's sake. Dr. Brocas has too good a heart to refuse to cheer you by the same avowal. We had better seek him out. I will speak to him first."

Claribel led the way, and Lord Harry silently followed.

Arrived within a stone's-throw of the cottage, she saw Dr. Brocas approaching. His countenance wore an air of unusual gravity, and the trace of sorrow was on his cheek, but the storm of passion had subsided.

"Child!" he said, not observing Lord Harry, who had lingered behind, "I feel better to-day than after any previous visit. Some time or other I will tell you all this sad story. But what is the matter? Your eyes are red, as if you had been crying."

"I have had cause, my dear sir, to cry, and yet—they tell me—to be glad."

"They tell you,! Who tell you? Whom have you seen?"

"I, sir, have been the bearer of some unexpected news to this young lady," said Lord Harry, advancing. "Let me repeat it, as briefly as I did to her. Claribel is the daughter of your friend Lord James FitzLupus, who, under the name of Mr. Page, married Miss Mary Mellowes. On his death-bed, an hour ago, my father

revealed this secret. There is more to tell, if you will kindly give me the opportunity; but, first, I have a message for yourself. 'Tell Dr. Brocas,' said my father, that I die, asking his pardon.' You know, sir, to what he referred."

Dr. Brocas made no reply; he took Lord Harry's hands between his and bent over them. When he raised his head again, he said:

"That angel has interceded. The past is obliterated."

There was a pause for a few moments, during which nobody spoke.

Dr. Brocas was the first to break silence.

"We are in this part of the country for a few days at The Wheatsheaf, on the Broadstone-road—an old haunt of mine in former days. I, as well as your cousin, Lord Harry, shall be glad to see you there, when your convenience admits of your coming."

"To-morrow evening, then," answered Lord Harry. "My visit is one of necessity, for my cousin's affairs are of moment"

"It will be as well to say 'good-by' here," said Claribel, extending her hand.

So they parted. Lord Harry took his way through the village, and Dr Brocas returned to the carriage. They woke up Mrs. Basset, and drove back to the inn.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CATASTROPHE.

FAST as Brunton rode, and fierce as were the thoughts that raged in his breast, the impression that the features he had seen were really those of the woman he loved—loved in the midst of all his deep duplicity—gained strength at every stride, and as soon as he could check his headlong speed he stopped to examine what kind of place it could be at which the unexpected vision had appeared.

He had passed the house several hundred yards before he turned, but he was still near enough to perceive some one in the balcony of the upper floor, who had probably been brought out by the noise of his horse's feet, and who seemed to be watching his flight.

Again Brunton was struck by a resemblance: he imagined that in the portly form of this person he recognised Dr. Brocas.

About the house itself there could be no mistake: the sign of a large golden wheatsheaf, resplendent on an azure field, which swung over the door, left no doubt of its character.

But how came Dr. Brocas at a country inn near Broadstone, when Brunton had left him, as he supposed, at Fulham? And how did it happen that Claribel was there also?

Knowing nothing of the attraction which the locality might have for either, he felt altogether at a loss to account for their presence.

After a few moments' consideration he decided on riding back to solve his doubts.

As Brunton approached the inn all further uncertainty

was at an end. It was, indeed, the learned civilian who leaned over the balcony, and beyond him, through the open window, Brunton discerned the figure of Claribel, standing beside Mrs. Basset.

Dr. Brocas, whose cheerfulness a night's rest had fully restored, expressed his surprise at seeing Brunton.

"I almost fancied," he said, "as you scoured along, that I saw Wilhelm galloping for his bride, or the Wild Huntsman in search of a victim!"

Neither of these similes sounded very pleasantly in Brunton's ears, but he forced himself to smile as he replied:

"My horse was even in greater haste than myself, but I thought I could not be deceived in believing that I saw Miss Page."

Brunton took off his hat as he spoke and bowed low to Claribel, who returned his salute very coldly, and then fell back.

"It is a most unforeseen pleasure," he continued, "to meet with friends in this very rural district—friends whom I supposed to be in London."

"It is quite as great a surprise, and no less a pleasure," replied Dr. Brocas, "to see you, Mr. Brunton. Does accident bring you into this part of the country?"

"On this spot—I believe—yes," answered Brunton, with a little hesitation, "for I have, I perceive, mistaken my way; but the truth is, I am—that is—I was—on a visit near here, which circumstances—sudden business—obliged me to close sooner than I intended, and I was hurrying back to prepare for my departure. Are you making any stay yourself, sir?"

"We are only *in villeggiatura* for a day or two," replied Dr. Brocas, "taking our ease in our inn, and enjoying this charming neighbourhood. I know the country well. In fact, I am indigenous. That house in the park yonder is where I was born. There are some fine things hereabouts. The Roman encampment,—the Druid circle,—Saint Cuthbert's Abbey:—it is a pity you should go away without visiting Saint Cuthbert's. But I see yo

are impatient to be off. We won't detain you. *Au revoir* in town—at Vallombrosa!"

Brunton bit his lips with vexation. But for his own hasty statement he might have invented some excuse for remaining in the country—Dr. Brocas might have invited him to the inn—he might have had a better opportunity than ever of speaking to Claribel! But, as the case stood, he was obliged to save appearances; besides, it was absolutely necessary that he should reach Broadstone House and take his departure before the return of Mrs. Velters and her party. With all his hardihood, he could not again meet Miss Travers. The remembrance, too, of his conduct towards Margaret Nalders stung him like an adder. To take such a step for nothing—for worse than nothing! He fretted with fever while Dr. Brocas spoke, as his eye vainly sought for Claribel, who, during the conversation, had left the room. Had there been the slightest relenting sign on her part, he would have stayed at any risk,—so that he could only have been near her!

As calmly, then, as he could, he said to Dr. Brocas:

"I shall not fail to pay my respects very soon, to make up for my present disappointment. As you say, sir, that this neighbourhood is familiar to you, can you tell me if this road leads to Broadstone—to the house, I mean, where Mr. Velters, the banker, lives?"

"This road, at the pace you were going," replied Dr. Brocas, laughing, "would very soon have taken you miles away from it. If you are the guest of my successor, whose name I never knew till now, you must ride back about half a mile to the heath, and follow the turning to the right: you will soon see the park gates."

Another glance was sent in search of Claribel, but he was obliged to take leave without seeing her again, and it may be doubted whether the courteous wave of the learned civilian's hand, or the superfine curtsey of Mrs. Basset, were any compensation for her non-appearance.

Following the directions of Dr. Brocas, Brunton

speedily recovered the distance he had lost, and made straight for Broadstone House. As he passed the front of the building he observed Mr. Velters in his study, but, like many who study after luncheon, that gentleman was fast asleep, and the "History of Banking" reposed on the floor where it had fallen. As there is nothing that compromises a man's dignity more than being suddenly awakened under circumstances of this kind, Brunton was too considerate to expose the great man to any such mortification. He therefore took no notice of his host, but when he had delivered his mare to Mr. Maggs—who chuckled rather at seeing Brunton instead of his master—he went to his room, wrote a few lines to Mr. Velters assigning a sufficient reason for his departure, laid an embargo on one of the Broadstone villagers who had come up to the house to see the still-room maid with whom he kept company, loaded the lover with his portmanteau, and, following him on foot, was clear of the precincts of the banker's domain almost as soon as his late companions to the ruins re-entered it.

So far, all was well; but what did he propose to do next?

A train would leave the Broadstone station in the course of an hour, but what—Brunton asked himself—should he gain by reaching town that evening? Who was there in London whom he so much desired to see? Was he not, on the contrary, leaving behind the only person he cared for? He answered these questions as promptly as they rose, and determined not to go.

This intention he kept to himself, but as soon as he had dismissed his attendant he sent his portmanteau into the railway hotel, ordered a bed there, and endeavoured, by dining, to consume the time till evening drew on.

He had enough to occupy his thoughts.

The *coup manqué* with Alice Travers was a constant torment; the course he should adopt with respect to Claribel an unceasing anxiety. And there were other considerations beside: the relation in which he stood

towards Mr. Ashley; that long-cherished purpose of the Hebrew Dealer now coinciding with his own; the actual value of his own position; the means by which he had contrived to achieve it; the peril, known but to one other person, that environed him in the midst of his prosperity.

What! danger to the Millionaire, whose unparalleled success was the theme of every one's discourse, the object of every one's envy?

Yes; danger. And that danger imminent. The discovery of the real state of his affairs, of the system on which his enormous speculations were based, might be made at any moment, and then the whole fabric would fall as rapidly as it rose. Brunton was supported in his East Indian business, as we have already seen, by the credit of the house in Broad-street, and he had not spared to make use of that credit. But this was not all: there were transactions to a vast extent in which something more than the credit of Temple Travers had assisted: transactions ostensibly conducted in their name, of which they were in complete ignorance. While Brunton was still in their employment, he had acquired a knowledge of certain circumstances, which, skilfully used, might be turned greatly to his own profit, but he had reserved his opportunity till he became his own master. Of the dishonesty of the proceeding he was fully aware, but like the majority of those who go wrong he placed his reliance on some lucky hit which would enable him to cover amounts surreptitiously obtained. If no discovery were made, he might continue for years as he had already begun, and in the mean time, if he could only succeed in marrying Miss Travers, with or without the consent of her father, publicly or privately—he cared not how—he might then set discovery at defiance. For the sake of one identified with themselves the Broad-street house would make no stir—would willingly submit to any pecuniary loss; whatever compromise took place he should still be a Millionaire.

This had been Brunton's consolation while his suit was still in abeyance—while, as he flattered himself, there was every prospect of success. But his eyes were all at once opened. He had reckoned immeasurably without his host. The contempt and scorn with which Miss Travers had rejected his daring avowal, left not the slightest avenue for hope. He saw, too, how strongly she suspected that he had tampered with the affections of her dearest friend. There was no consideration that could reasonably withhold her from relating to her father everything that had taken place, and, from his pride and anger combined, what might not be expected! A rupture with the Broad-street house was certain.

Well, let it come, then, this rupture! It must have happened, in some shape or other, sooner or later. But, he now asked himself, had he employed to their full extent the means he possessed of injuring the house of Temple Travers? No! The field was still open for even wider operations: a deeper blow might yet be struck, if he consented to act as Mr. Ashley had long counselled. And why not consent? His interest in the stability of the great firm was at an end. Let it only last till he had made enough by it to live at his ease elsewhere: on the continent of Europe, if he could; in America, if it were necessary.

That thought led him back again to Claribel.

As the farce of making love to Margaret Nalders was now over—as Miss Travers was no longer *sur ses bras* —nothing prevented him from seeking Claribel with honourable intentions. He easily glossed over the freedom of his first address. Actresses in general were not difficult; why should she be so prudish as to resent what ninety-nine out of a hundred would only laugh at or accept as a compliment? Besides, had he not atoned for the offence by a declaration of unfeigned regret for its unintentional committal? Excellent reasoning this, if there had existed any sentiment to plead for him in

Claribel's bosom, but, with all his penetration, Brunton did not see that irrepressible dislike was mingled with her resentment. He had so much confidence in his powers of pleasing—though, to be sure, his latest attempt in that line was not very encouraging—that he trusted to one more private interview to set himself perfectly right, and that interview he was bent on having. For this purpose he had delayed his return to London.

Brunton was one who never drew back from a resolution once formed, and the strong wine he drank at dinner stimulated his previous determination. He foresaw no obstacle with Claribel, but—a thought which would scarcely have occurred to him in a more sober moment—he had the means at hand of enforcing her compliance by fear, in case she refused to listen to his entreaties; and while the thought was on him he went to his bedroom and took out a revolver which he always kept in his travelling-case.

"The sight of a weapon is quite enough for a woman," he said, as he concealed it in his breast.

It was by this time almost dark, and after leaving word that he would return before the hotel shut up for the night, Brunton set out on foot for The Wheatsheaf, distant by the road about a couple of miles, so that by the time he got there the evening had quite closed in.

Lights were scattered in the lower part of the house, but the room which Dr. Brocas had occupied in the afternoon was apparently untenanted—a circumstance easily to be accounted for by the fact that beneath the windows some five or six rustics were seated in a row smoking their pipes and drinking "towards" each other's good health. Their fragrant talk would scarcely be agreeable to the delicate susceptibilities of the learned civilian, and Brunton, therefore, rightly supposed that he had removed to another apartment.

Parallel with the high road ran the inn garden, enclosed within a hedged shrubbery. Access to it might

be obtained by a small gate in front, but as Brunton did not wish to be seen, he was obliged to seek for another entrance. He accordingly walked past the inn like any ordinary traveller, and when he had reached the end of the shrubbery crossed over, and had little difficulty in forcing his way through the hedge. Once in the garden, he soon arrived at an open part from whence he could survey the building. A large bay-windowed room looked out on that side; a chandelier hung from the ceiling, and by its light Brunton thought he made out the figure of Claribel.

To be certain of this, he cautiously went closer, and then he beheld, not only Claribel, Mrs. Basset, and Dr. Brocas, but a fourth person, whom Brunton, though he had seen him only once before, instantly knew to be Lord Harry FitzLupus. He was engaged in earnest conversation with Claribel, while Dr. Brocas, who had some papers before him, to which he seemed to be directing the attention of Mrs. Basset, occasionally glanced at her niece with an approving smile.

The evident interest with which Claribel listened, the *empressement* of the young nobleman's manner, and the pleased expression of Dr. Brocas, had but one interpretation for Brunton.

Lord Harry was the accepted lover of Claribel!

Brunton trembled with jealous agony in every limb, and muttered a heavy and sweeping curse, still watching and straining every faculty to catch a word confirmatory of his dire suspicion.

He was too far off to hear what was said, but it was only by remaining in his present position that he could witness what was passing:—so he stayed.

The conversation continued, and that it was upon no ordinary theme, it was impossible for Brunton to doubt.

What bitter revenge he meditated!

Upon Lord Harry as his rival; upon Dr. Brocas, the double faced hypocrite, who now abetted the pretensions of the very man whose father he had heard him de-

nounce; upon Claribel—for the reason that she had withheld her love from him and bestowed it where he hated.

At length there was a movement in the room: Lord Harry rose to take leave.

Brunton witnessed how cordially—as, he read it, how affectionately—Claribel gave her hand.

He crossed the grass, and, hidden in the deep shadow of the house, glued himself to the wall and listened to their parting.

"Within a week, then, Claribel," he heard Lord Harry say, "when all is over at the castle, we shall meet again, and everything will be settled."

"In the mean time," this was the voice of Dr. Brocas, "we remain quietly here."

"It will go hard with me," thought Brunton, "if I do not prevent this meeting—a little disturb this quiet."

He turned from the house, and, quickly retracing his steps, had again planted himself in the road, when a gig drove away from the door of The Wheatsheaf, where the landlord and his waiters stood bowing to the ground.

Brunton was drunk with passion—with passion more than wine. The gig with Lord Harry and his groom passed close to the spot where he stood. Lord Harry was within a yard of him. It was the impulse of a moment: he drew out his revolver and fired.

With a deep groan his victim fell on the ground, and Brunton plunged into a plantation behind him, while a hue and cry arose from the porch of the inn.

Danger made Brunton cool.

"I must put them on a false scent," he said.

He ran quickly for a hundred yards in the direction contrary to that which he meant to take, and fired another barrel.

"They will think I have killed myself, and lose the night in searching."

He threw away the pistol, dashed through the plantation, gained an open field, and wound his way back

again to the high road at a point considerably nearer the railway station than where he had first stood. His *ruse* had succeeded: nobody was following, and he slowly walked to his hotel, where he quietly desired to be called in time for the early train. He had nerve enough to go to bed and pass the night there, alone, with the guilt of blood upon his head, and when morning came he answered the porter's summons in the drowsy tone of a man who is just awakened.

At the station a group of people were eagerly talking; a policeman was amongst them. Brunton asked him what was the matter.

"A party was shot, sir, last night," replied the man, touching his hat, "at no great distance from here."

"That's very bad," said Brunton. "Was the—the —person killed?"

"I can't exactly make out," returned the policeman, "but I'm wanted down there, and shall very soon know. We've telegrafted along the line to stop any suspicious persons."

"The telegraph is invaluable for such purposes," returned Brunton. "It's to be hoped the rascals won't escape."

He took his seat in the carriage, the whistle sounded, and the scene of crime was left behind.

"I was too hasty," said Brunton, as the train whirled along. "I might have been revenged another way. I wish to God I knew if he were alive or dead!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SCALE TREMBLING.

UNHARMED by whatever communication had sped along the telegraphic wires, Brunton arrived safely in London.

Before he attended to anything else, he proceeded straight to Finsbury-circus to see Mr. Ashley.

He found him in a mood for mischief, a circumstance having just occurred which caused him considerable annoyance.

It related, of course, to money matters, the pivot on which everything turns in this bargain-driving world of ours.

It was little more than four-and-twenty hours since the Hebrew Dealer had heard something greatly to the disadvantage—a thing which happens oftener than the reverse—of a person whom he had looked upon as one of his most eligible clients. Mr. Ashley's in-and-out life threw him in the way of all sorts of people, and it so chanced that he fell in with Mr. Blackshaw, the eminent coachmaker, who had sold—no, not exactly that—who had supplied Dr. Brocas with the carriage which so much excited the admiration of Mr. and Mrs. Cutts on the evening of their memorable party. Being in want of a little money—even eminent coachmakers may be troubled with that malady—Mr. Blackshaw had gone to "The Circus" about it, and in producing his securities, set two or three bills aside as paper which he did not think Mr. Ashley would be likely to touch. One acceptance caught the Hebrew's keen eye. It was that of the learned civilian on the back of a bill, at nine months, for the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds.

"What's that?" said Mr. Ashley.

Mr. Blackshaw shrugged his shoulders.

"No good, I'm afraid. A renewal,—overdue again, six weeks. I should rather like to know where I could put my hand on the acceptor."

Mr. Ashley made no observation, but shivered at the recollection of the expensive *objets* which he had lately sent to Fulham, and when he had finished his affair with the coachmaker, set out—Saturday though it was—for that suburb. Dr. Brocas was not at home—an answer often given, but truly on this occasion—as it was the day of his departure for Hampshire to spend his college-money. Being on the spot, Mr. Ashley thought he would just inquire what sort of reputation the learned civilian enjoyed in the place where he resided. To his infinite disgust, the answers he received were anything but consoling: it was not merely want of punctuality, but literally non-payment that every one complained of, and he returned to town in very ill-humour—a frame of mind which was not improved by the intervention of a day of inaction before he could take any steps to recover his property, or its value, from Dr. Brocas.

Mr. Ashley was reading the *Times* when Brunton entered. Being before all things a man of business, he did not put down the paper, but merely nodded a salutation. Presently, however, he came to a paragraph which made him speak.

"Here's something worth knowing. Lord Wolverton's dead. This will affect Lord Harry FitzLupus. I must look after his lordship. Why, Brunton! what on earth's the matter with you? You look as pale as a ghost!"

"Do I?" said Brunton, making an effort to reply. Perhaps I do. I feel rather sick all at once. I haven't eakfasted. Let me have a glass of brandy."

"Not breakfasted?" repeated Mr. Ashley, looking sharply at his friend. "What have you been about?"

"No-thing—no-thing," stammered Brunton. "I came up by the train from Broadstone. I was down at Velters's place."

"What were you doing there?"

"I'll tell you, presently. For God's sake give me some brandy, whisky, anything to turn this sickness."

Mr. Ashley went to a cellaret and poured out some brandy.

"Take care!" he said, noticing the way in which Brunton's hand shook; "you'll spill it all. Gone at a gulp! Any better?"

Brunton made a sign in the affirmative.

"So," continued Mr. Ashley, "you've been staying at Broadstone? That's not very far from Wolverton Castle. You didn't happen to stumble upon Lord Harry? Sick again!"

Brunton gasped for utterance; his tongue and throat were dry; he felt as if he were choking. At last he mastered his emotion.

"Can you guess why I came here so soon?" he asked.

Then without giving Mr. Ashley time to reply, he went on:

"I've made up my mind to fill in and sign those papers!"

A gleam of satisfaction played over the sallow features of the Hebrew Dealer.

"At last!" he said.

"Well," remarked Brunton, "better late than never."

"Some folks," returned Mr. Ashley, with a horrible grin, "would say exactly the reverse. But I'm not the one to quarrel with your resolution. Only be careful not to glut the market."

Brunton entered into an explanation of the course he proposed to adopt. It was a deep-laid scheme for damaging the house of Temple Travers, of which extensive forgery was the basis—forgery of the most artful construction. It was an amplification, as we have said, of a means already resorted to for extending Brunton's own credit and seriously compromising that of

his former employers. Its progress would be more or less rapid as accident might determine,—of that Brunton took little heed, his only care being about the present. With no tenderness of conscience at any time, he was utterly reckless now which way the ruin spread. What could affect him worse than the discovery of last night's deed? Only a few days more and he would put the seas between his crime and its possible retribution. But how should he fly? With Claribel? Her image was a terror to him. For her sake he had imbrued his hands in blood. At that moment, for aught he knew—how, indeed, could he doubt?—she was weeping beside the body of her murdered lover! But yet—but yet—could he relinquish her? One for whom he had ventured so deeply! To stave off thoughts like these, which pursued him throughout his journey from Broadstone, he gave occupation to his mind by planning the details of the fraudulent operations on which he had resolved. The contemplation of a fresh crime afforded him actual relief. On this account, when startled by the casual mention of Lord Harry's name, he had plunged at once into the subject from which he had so long kept aloof. He was ready now to do all that Mr. Ashley wished, and, finding him so eager, his wily colleague kindly allowed Brunton to take all the risk on his own shoulders.

The project for "feeding fat his ancient grudge" against the firm of Temple Travers engrossed Mr. Ashley so completely as, for a time, to exclude all others: but when he had heard Brunton out and offered advice on certain points, the recollection of Dr. Brocas's affair came back in full force, and though Brunton was impatient to be gone, fearing some further allusion to Lord Harry, he kept him prisoner till he had spoken of it.

"Do you know, Brunton," he said, "I strongly suspect I've been done, like a good many more, by that magnificent friend of yours."

"Of mine? Who do you mean?"

"The old gentleman at Fulham."

"At Fulham!" reiterated Brunton, becoming again the colour of marble.

"Yes. Dr. Brocas. There's an unpleasantry in that quarter. Does he owe *you* money, that you wince at his name in that way?"

"Me! No! But what about him?" asked Brunton, forcing himself to speak.

Mr. Ashley went into the matter, denouncing the learned civilian as little better than a swindler: he was deeply mortified that his own acuteness should have been foiled, and it made him doubly vindictive.

"Nobody takes me in with impunity, Brunton. That old fellow has managed to get more than a thousand pounds' worth of my property. But I'll have it out of him before another day is over. He was in the country, they said, when I called on Saturday, but they expected him back this morning. He'll find an execution waiting for him. I'll put a man in possession this very day, as sure as my name's—what it is!"

Brunton was saved the embarrassment of an answer by a knock at the door, which made Mr. Ashley go to the window.

"I sent for Cutts," he said, "to come here early this morning. He knows where this Dr. Brocas is, I'll be bound."

Brunton knew also, but though a word would have gratified his revenge, he did not dare to speak.

"I've been waiting for you this hour, Cutts," said Mr. Ashley, as the auctioneer entered the room.

"I should have been here *two* hours ago," replied the auctioneer, "if something hadn't happened. Ah, Brunton, how d'ye do?"

"What something?" asked Mr. Ashley.

"Why, there's an awkward report down at Scotland Yard. A man I met told me of it, and I went to see if it was true."

"Can't you say what it is and have done," exclaimed Mr. Ashley; "I suppose it don't concern me?"

"If it don't concern you, it concerns somebody you know, and you won't like it, I can tell you."

A nervous dread came over Brunton; he rose to leave the room, but lingered, with his hand on the door, anxious yet afraid to hear what Cutts had to say.

"Speak out, then," said Mr. Ashley, angrily.

"Well," said Cutts, "there's a report that Lord Harry FitzLupus has been killed."

Brunton staggered, and would have fallen if he had not clung to the door for support."

Mr. Ashley's surprise gave him time to recover himself, but not before Cutts had cast on him a look of wonder.

"Killed!" cried Mr. Ashley. "The devil! How? When? Where?"

"The news, such as it is," answered Cutts, "came up by telegraph, and wasn't very well worded, but as well as they could make it out at the Yard it comes to this. Lord Harry and his groom were driving in a gig last night, and some fellow—they don't know if he's a robber or not—fired at them, and tumbled Lord Harry over."

"And where did it happen?" asked Mr. Ashley.

"Close to a plantation just outside Broadstone Park—somewhere down in Hampshire."

"Broadstone!" exclaimed Mr. Ashley. "Why, that's where you were, Brunton. Did you hear anything of it?"

The question was asked in vain. Brunton was gone, and the loud bang of the street door was all the answer Mr. Ashley received.

The Hebrew Dealer was too much interested in the news to take any notice, just then, of Brunton's abrupt disappearance. He pressed Cutts for further information, but the auctioneer could only repeat the telegraphic message as he had heard it from the police.

If this announcement were true it accumulated misfortune on the head of Mr. Ashley. He held acceptances of Lord Harry FitzLupus to a very large amount. The

death of Lord Wolverton had just flushed him with the hope of a speedy settlement: there was no end to the prospect of delay; there was every likelihood of his claims being contested, if he had to do with Lord Harry's family.

But although Cutts was the bearer of intelligence which so nearly affected his patron's interests, a look of swaggering satisfaction appeared on his countenance, which Mr. Ashley could not comprehend.

The auctioneer observed that he was the object of scrutiny.

"I'm sorry," he said, thrusting his hands into his trousers-pockets and jingling some silver—"I'm sorry for my noble relative."

"Your noble relative, Cutts!" said Mr. Ashley. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Poor Lord Harry!" apostrophised the auctioneer; "I suppose I shall have to attend the funeral."

Mr. Ashley looked at Cutts in amazement. Had he, he asked him, utterly and entirely taken leave of his senses?

"Far from it," was the reply. "Never less disposed to turn lunatic. With his prospects!"

The Hebrew Dealer was himself nearly distracted, and urged Cutts to speak plainly, in terms that admitted of no delay.

"You know," he said, "the relationship which exists between Mrs. Cutts and Miss Claribel—ah—ah—Page? Yes, 'Page,' that will do for the present. You know that, sir?"

Mr. Ashley assented.

"Well, sir, her niece, her own blood relation, my niece-in-law, sir, is a lady of rank. Mrs. Cutts and the late Lord Wolverton stand—stood I should say—in the same affinity towards my Lady Claribel FitzLupus; that's her real name, sir—a lady by birth and title! Kate had a letter this morning from her sister, Mrs. Basset, relating the whole story. The fact only transpired on

Saturday—quite a romance, Mrs. B. says. I was on my way here to apprise you of it when I heard of my noble nephew's accident."

"Ass and fool!" growled the Hebrew Dealer. "I must have some better warranty for this than your word. You're telling me a pack of improbable lies—one worse than the other."

"Judge for yourself, then," said Cutts, sullenly throwing Mrs. Basset's letter on the table. "When you've read that, you've only to go to the station and see how true the rest is."

Mr. Ashley seized the letter. It was long and ill-spelt. When he had got about half way through he paused.

"I remember," he said, reflecting, "the marquis had an only brother, who made, it was reported, an odd kind of marriage. It may be as she says. If so, the girl will come in for a large fortune. But she won't be 'my lady,' nevertheless. What else is there?"

He resumed the letter, but stopped again almost immediately.

"How's this?" he exclaimed. "Staying with Dr. Brocas! 'at The Wheatsheaf Inn, near Broadstone.' Why, all the world's at Broadstone! Did you know where Dr. Brocas was?"

"I only knew," returned Cutts, "that he had taken my wife's sister and my lady—that is, our niece, Claribel—into the country for a day or two. Little Basset, the watchmaker, took the liberty, as Kate says, of calling at our door, yesterday, to say so."

"This is a complicated business," thought Mr. Ashley. "It won't do to be too precipitate. A large fortune. Who knows whether the doctor mightn't marry her. Stranger matches than that have been made. I won't put in the execution—just yet. What presses most is to learn the truth of this report about Lord Harry Fitz-Lupus. I should lose heavily by his death. His death! Now I come to think of it, what made Brunton in such a state whenever his name was mentioned? That f

ness was only a pretence. He knows something about this affair. Can he have had any hand in it? But then, why? They were strangers to each other."

After a few moments' silence, Mr. Ashley turned to Cutts.

"Did Brunton's manner strike you at all," he said, "before he went away just now?"

"I thought he looked devilish queer," returned Cutts, "when I was telling you about Lord Harry. He bolted, though, in the middle of it."

"Was Brunton acquainted with him?"

"I know they met once."

"Where was that?"

"At our house. You were there too."

"Oh, I remember. The night the play was read."

"But as to their making acquaintance, I can't say; I should rather think not."

"Why not?"

"A pretty good reason, I fancy."

"What was that?"

"There was a lady in the case; but you musn't breathe a syllable of this to Brunton. He'd cut my throat if he knew I named it."

"You may trust me," said Mr. Ashley. "Who was the lady?"

"I shouldn't, perhaps, have told you, if you'd asked me yesterday, but to-day it's a different thing. Brunton was after Claribel; and so was Lord Harry."

Quick as thought, Mr. Ashley put certain facts in combination, and made a guess not far from the truth; but that guess he locked in his own bosom.

"It will be time enough to profit by it when I know more. If the act be his, I owe him no thanks: on the contrary, it loses me my money. I shall look to him for payment. So take care of yourself, Mr. Brunton." Then, replying to Cutts, he said,

"The best reason possible for their not seeking each other's society."

"It ruins a man, though, whether he likes a fellow or

not, when he hears of his sudden death," observed Cutts, sententiously.

"So it does," replied Mr. Ashley, glad to find that his secret thought had not been penetrated. "Come with me to Scotland Yard, and let us see if we can learn any more."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SLIGHT MISTAKE.

HAUNTED by the apprehension of impending evil, Brunton hurried from Mr. Ashley's house less firm of purpose than he had ever felt before.

The strength of nerve on which he relied had sustained him amongst strangers, but when he came to mingle again with his old associates and heard them speak of his victim—when he looked to be told of his crime, as the news of the day, by the first person he might chance to meet—when the fear came across him, as come it would, that his secret was known somewhere, soon to be spread everywhere—his natural resolution gave way, and he hesitated on his course of action.

It would be folly to fly before he was suspected, yet how dangerous to remain if suspicion pointed at him. To yield to the dread that was on his mind and seek safety in immediate flight, would overthrow all his long-cherished schemes, while to stay till the blow fell would equally involve him in ruin.

Thus debating, he resolved to compromise between these extremes: while closely watchful of everything that bore on the subject of his fear, he would unremittingly labour to bring his financial operations to a close, and this task accomplished he would at once withdraw from the scene—suddenly, and he hoped securely.

To baffle pursuit his first object was to obtain passports for different parts of the Continent, one under his real name and all the rest fictitious. The agency system made such an arrangement easy, and when he had put this matter *en train*, he proceeded to his place of business to complete the *coup* on which he had agreed with the Hebrew Dealer, denying himself, in general terms, to all except that individual.

The day wore on, and his occupation made rapid progress. If he could get through his work before night he need not care for the newspaper accounts of the following day: it was not likely that they could give more than a general statement of what had occurred near Broadstone—and according to the complexion of that statement he should be guided.

In the course of the morning he received a visit from Mr. Ashley, who, greatly to Brunton's relief, said nothing about Lord Harry, but confined himself entirely to the work on which Brunton was engaged. The truth is he had learnt no more at the police-office than Cutts had already told him, the telegraphic message being so obscurely worded as to raise some doubt about the real nature of the fact alleged. Everything, therefore, passed quite amicably on the occasion; so amicably, indeed, that, to enable Brunton to complete an operation which he said was of immediate necessity, the Hebrew Dealer lent his confederate a somewhat heavy cheque, to be returned on the following day when squaring their mutual accounts. It is needless to say that Brunton cashed this cheque the moment Mr. Ashley's back was turned. It was a safeguard in the event of accident, and one which the actual condition of his own affairs prevented Brunton from obtaining so readily.

The day wore on, and Brunton's occupation drew towards a close. He thought of his rejection by Alice, and a gleam of gratified vengeance lit up his features, as he surveyed the pile of bills on which he had forged the acceptances of Temple Travers—bills which, through

the connexion he had formed by their means, would soon be in circulation amongst the foreign correspondents of the Broad-street house. It could not fail to be a heavy embarrassment to them—it might lead to a stoppage, it must at least shake their credit, and shaken credit is like a woman slandered: the blot is ineffaceable!

But was Brunton about to relinquish the position he had with so much toil achieved, solely to gratify his revenge? Well,—if the truth must be told, which has indeed been already hinted at, his position was no longer tenable. His speculations had been so daring, his failures so extensive, and the means to which he had had recourse to cover those failures so hazardous, that instantaneous bankruptcy was almost inevitable;—it was at any rate certain—and in becoming bankrupt himself he determined to strike hard enough to cause others to share his fate.

It may be asked if the astute Mr. Ashley was ignorant of this state of things? To the full extent of that which Brunton knew he certainly was. His friend, he was aware, cultivated a vineyard on the slope of a volcano: he expected that the eruption would come some day and overwhelm the diligent labourer; but Mr. Ashley felt satisfied that he had made himself safe, and did not think the danger quite so near. He knew the rottenness of one-half of the great commercial reputations which were vaunted so loudly every day: those, too, must tumble, but it was no business of his, unless his interest moved him that way, to accelerate their fall. On the contrary, he held this creed in common with the great firm of Sanctimony, Profit, and Co., that even delinquency may be supported so long as it tends to your own advantage. This was the principle of Mr. Ashley's relations with Richard Brunton. Even Sanctimony, Profit, and Co. have sometimes burnt their fingers, and why not Mr. Ashley?

Meanwhile, while Brunton was weaving his net for the house of Temple Travers, the managing representative

of that firm had not been wholly unoccupied with the concerns of the Millionaire of Mincing-lane.

From herself Mr. Velters would never have heard of Brunton's proposal to Alice, but we have seen that Mr. Velters had a wife who, though learned, was worldly, though steeped in science, was accessible to the instinct of self-protection; Mrs. Velters, in her turn, had a son, about whose prospects in life she was not unsolicitous; and this son—our friend, Mr. Albert, the owner of the runaway chesnut—had with his own ears and eyes been a witness to the scene in the ruins of Saint Cuthbert. To stop his mother's mouth when she began, on their return home, to scold him for his folly in not keeping close to Miss Travers—to be able to dissipate her fears and turn her anger into commendation, Mr. Albert Velters left nothing untold of what he had heard and seen. Mrs. Velters rejoiced exceedingly when the story was related, but she did not limit herself to simple rejoicing: her bosom, like those rivers whose beds are dry for half the year, had, like them, its periods of overflow, and in the present instance it took the shape of womanly sympathy. It was womanly sympathy, then, which enabled her to obtain from Alice a confirmation of all that Brunton had dared to do.

"The insolence of this person must be crushed at once!" exclaimed Mrs. Velters, haughtily—and, perhaps, a little vindictively; "your father, my dear Miss Travers, must not remain in ignorance of the designs of so unprincipled a man!"

Alice, who still burnt with resentment, replied that her first care should be that which Mrs. Velters recommended, and the stimulus to its adoption was added on the following morning by the receipt of a letter from Margaret Nalders.

This letter spoke of her astonishment at finding her uncle in perfect health on reaching her journey's end: he had authorised no such despatch as that which had reached his niece, though delighted, under any circum-

stances, to fold her to his breast; and the mystery of the summons was still unexplained. On the other hand, the expansion of feeling to which her sudden visit had given rise, had led Margaret to speak to her uncle on a subject which, till that hour, she had kept a secret from her darling Alice. She could not even now reveal it altogether, for a conditional promise bound her still to secrecy; but she betrayed no promise, if she withheld the name of him who had exacted it, in acknowledging that her affections were engaged, that she had accepted an offer of marriage from one who in every respect was worthy of her choice, one whom to love was the duty as well as the happiness of a kind and grateful heart.

There was need of much closer reticence if Margaret really sought to hide the knowledge of who it was she loved, and at another moment Alice would have smiled at the transparent deception; but when Brunton's recent declaration gave her the assurance that villany, the basest—falsehood, the meanest—heartlessness, the most corrupt—were added to his unparalleled audacity, her indignation reached its climax.

But in the height of her anger there arose also the desire to save her friend.

To save her from what? Disappointment and a broken heart? Disappointment more certain in fruition, a heart more completely broken if its desire were granted, would be the lot of Margaret in becoming the wife of Richard Brunton. He who had proved so deep a traitor was the last person on earth to wed with one whom Alice loved like a sister. Margaret must be saved from herself.

To answer her letter was Alice's first difficulty. She decided on a hasty form of reply—pleaded the occurrence of something unusually important, which left her with barely a moment's leisure—alluded vaguely to the half-revelation which Margaret had made—and earnestly urged her—for the first time in her life—not to return too soon, but stay for the present with her uncle, to

whom Alice, if he could receive her, would shortly pay a visit. Miss Travers thus avoided the necessity of a direct explanation—and it gave her time to think of what might best be done.

The first result of the conversation between Alice and Mrs. Velters was their departure from Broadstone, in company with Mr. Velters; its second consequence was an interview between Mr. Travers and his daughter in Belgrave-square; its third and final issue, for that day, was a measure for which Brunton was in a great degree prepared—the severance of all connexion with the great house of Temple Travers.

Jove's messenger on this occasion—that is to say, the emissary whom Mr. Velters selected as the bearer of his behests—was the trustworthy Mr. Browser.

With the foam of Stout upon his lips, Mr. Browser had been summoned from his "Dining Rooms;" with the fragrant odour in his breath which Stout and Stilton impart at noonday, Mr. Browser had penetrated the *sanctum* of the Managing Partner; but Mr. Velters was a man impervious to the sense of smell, and the post-prandial condition of the confidential clerk went by unheeded.

"Close the account of Brunton and Co., of Mincing-lane. Withdraw from them all papers authorising transactions on the recommendation of Temple Travers. Intimate the same by letter. Carry that letter yourself."

It was well for Mr. Browser that nature had endowed him with a rapid digestion, or something like suffocation would have ensued on the sudden promulgation of this startling decree. He gasped for utterance, but as he was not expected to speak, *that* made no difference to Mr. Velters.

What! the model of commercial enterprise—the envy of the mercantile community—the Millionaire of Mincing-lane, cut off from all communication with the house of Temple Travers! Mr. Browser, awake; awake Mr. Browser! Has your noontide meal begotten

dreams? Are you standing, sitting, seeing, hearing? Is Mr. Velters in his senses, or have you lost yours?

Thoughts like these, surging up to confuse and bewilder him, made the balance-striking Mr. Browser rather longer over the process of closing the account of Brunton and Co., and writing the necessary letter, than if he had been dealing with Bullion, Brothers,—Hackblock and Towser,—Clink and Peppercastor, or any other euphonious firm with which the house in Broad-street had business relations. But it was done at last, and with a countenance solemn as a City toast-master, but silent as a mute, until "the funeral's done," Mr. Browser put on his hat and set out for Mincing-lane.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when he got there. All the usual signs of business were manifest, nothing indicated a screw loose anywhere, and Mr. Browser wondered more and more what could be the cause of the errand on which he had been sent. Being a deep diplomatist, he made no announcement of the fell purpose of his house, but entered cheerfully into the ordinary topics of City conversation,—the price of hides, tallow, bristles, and the like,—while a pipe-message communicated his arrival to the head of the firm.

"Show Mr. Browser in," was the almost immediate answer; and leaving molasses unquoted, Mr. Browser entered the private office. He found Brunton seated at a large writing-table, with a great number of papers before him. He had a pen in his hand as if on the point of addressing a sealed envelope, but put it down when Mr. Browser entered, and rose to shake hands.

"Ah, sir," said Mr. Browser, with a heavy sigh, "we may do it here, but there won't be no more of this sort of thing in public. Shaking of hands is over between Temple Travers and Brunton and Co. Please to look at that, sir, and read what's my orders."

Brunton took the letter and went through it, but, except by a tremulous movement of the lower lip, he betrayed no change of countenance. For a few moments

he was silent, with his eye fixed on Mr. Browser. He then spoke:

"This," he said, "is rather a sudden—some people would call it a harsh proceeding. It would have ruined many a man, but, thank God, I can weather it! You think it strange, Browser, don't you?"

"I can't make it out," returned honest Mr. Browser.

"No reason assigned—eh?"

"None that I know of. Why, it was but Saturday last you stood A 1 with Mr. V. I heard it from his own lips. And this is only Monday."

"Oh, a good deal may happen between Saturday and Monday," said Brunton, with a sinister smile. "Didn't you hear that I was at Broadstone yesterday?"

"No! were you?"

"Yes! And I'll tell you, Browser, why I went there. To settle the terms on which I was to take a part of the loan your house is going into. We couldn't agree about the matter. I was rather warm—Mr. Velters overbearing as usual" (Mr. Browser faintly groaned), "and the end of it was—a split. So your visit, you see, was not altogether a surprise."

"I'm sorry for it, any how," replied Mr. Browser. "I hoped the house and you would have gone on for ever. But Mr. V.'s instructions was perempt'ry: I must ask for the papers named in the margin."

"And you shall have them directly," said Brunton, opening a drawer with a kind of nervous alacrity. "They are quite at hand."

He took out a small bundle of papers, glanced at the endorsements, and put them in an envelope.

"You must help me, after all," said Brunton, with affected gaiety; "just light me that taper."

At the moment he was sealing up the papers, the message-pipe spoke:

"A person to see you, sir, on particular business."

What made the man of nerve tremble so violently that

he could hardly impress the wax? What made him turn so ghastly pale?

He pushed the envelope away from him, rose from his chair, walked to a door at the further end of the room, put his hand on the key, but did not turn the lock—took down his hat, replaced it—came back—motioned to Mr. Browser to sit still, and then replied through the pipe that the person must wait.

"If it's particular, sir, and our business is done——" suggested Mr. Browser.

"True, true," returned Brunton, "I must not keep you. I have only to put the address."

Seizing the packet, he wrote the superscription.

"There!" he said, "is an end of my obligation to your Mr. Velters. I may requite him, though, some day. But, Browser, there's a little matter between you and me. Shall we settle that? Will you have a cheque?"

"Not by no means, Mr. Brunton. We've no private difference. Take your time, sir. Any day. I'm safe with you, I know."

Another shake of the hand, which seemed to give Mr. Browser the greatest pleasure of the two, and Brunton was left to receive the person "on particular business."

"Shall I shoot myself on the spot, or let him arrest me here?" was Brunton's first ejaculation the moment he was alone.

There was a ventilator in the wall, so pierced as to show the whole of the outer office. He jumped up and looked through it.

"What a fool I am!" he exclaimed, "to be startled by every shadow! It is one of Ashley's fellows. He has come for the bills."

With a hand that still trembled he superscribed the packet that remained on the table, and took it himself to the messenger who was waiting outside.

"I shall be here after hours to-day," he said to t'

principal clerk, "but I don't want anybody to stay. Let those bills of lading for the *James Timperley* and *Ocean Queen* be ready the first thing in the morning."

He then went back to his room, and did not leave it again till some time after the office was closed, going out by a private door into a series of courts which led in different directions.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CHECK AND COUNTERCHECK.

TAKING his way through the by-streets and narrow passages that intersect the main thoroughfares between Mincing-lane and Finsbury-circus, Brunton proceeded to Mr. Ashley's.

He found him at home, but in no better humour than in the morning: indeed, the greeting he received was anything but cordial.

"What do you mean," said Mr. Ashley, "by sending me this heap of trash? I thought you had been busy about our affair?"

"Heap of trash!" replied Brunton. "Well, in one sense, perhaps, you are right, but it's not for us to make the discovery. What on earth more did you want?"

"I didn't want to be told what I knew already, that those people in Broad-street had helped you with their credit. Where are the bills?"

"Where? In the packet I sent you."

"You sent me nothing, I again say, but a parcel of rubbish. I should like to know what's the value of that —and that—and that!"

As he spoke he tossed several papers across the table, which the other eagerly caught up.

"I can't understand," said Brunton. "Why, these

are not——" he stammered. "Good God! I hope it's not the case! Have you nothing else?"

"No! I tell you," growled the Hebrew Dealer.

"Then," exclaimed Brunton, "by —— we're done!"

He dropped into a chair and buried his head in his hands.

But his reverie was only for an instant.

Rising quickly, he said:

"There is one chance left. I may have put them away when that idiot Browser disturbed me. I must go and see!"

"Stay!" cried Mr. Ashley, "I *must* know what all this means."

Brunton came close to his confederate.

"It means," he whispered, "that you and I have had our labour for our pains: at least I fear so. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, all the bills you expected are now in the hands of Temple Travers."

The Hebrew Dealer swore a fearful oath. His face was livid with rage.

"That won't mend the matter," said Brunton, coolly. "Better know the worst at once. You may swear away then to your heart's content. Come with me and help to look!"

In little more than five minutes they were both in Brunton's inner room, entering by the private way. They searched, they ransacked, they pulled out every paper, they examined every drawer, they opened every book; over and over again they took up the same thing and threw it down again with a curse. At length they stopped from sheer exhaustion, and sat steadfastly gazing at each other.

At last Mr. Ashley spoke.

"And you mean to say that you *did* send a sealed packet by that fellow Browser?"

Brunton had explained so much during their walk.

"There can be no doubt of *that*. It must have been the one I meant for you."

"What shall you do now?" asked Mr. Ashley

"Cut, of course," was Brunton's laconic reply.

"Ah!" said the Hebrew Dealer, with a long aspiration. "The best thing, too. But," he continued, "about that cheque I gave you this morning. I must have it back."

"So you shall," said Brunton, "to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" sneered the Jew; "where will you be to-morrow? No! I must have it now."

"But it's not here," returned Brunton. "They've locked it up in the safe, out there."

"Likely! 'They,' indeed! As if you ever let anything of value out of your own keeping! As if you hadn't the keys. I see where it is. You've cashed the cheque and got the money. But I'll have it from you, by ——!"

As fierce as a tiger the Hebrew Dealer threw himself on Brunton and tried to seize him by the throat. But he had forgotten in his passion the strength and agility of the man he had to deal with. Brunton stepped quickly aside, and then, with a back-handed sweep of his arm, he struck Mr. Ashley behind the ear and felled him to the ground, where he lay senseless.

"It's all up, now," he said, surveying the prostrate man. "With this devil for my enemy I must make quick work of it. I've half a mind to cut his throat, or trample him to death. But no! Not another victim before a second day is spent. His money will help me away. Give it back, indeed! I thought you knew better, Mr. Ashley. Stay! What's this?" he exclaimed, picking up something that had fallen from Mr. Ashley's pocket. "His bill-book. As well give myself the benefit of its contents: they may be useful hereafter. But I must make you safe, Mr. Ashley, at least for to-night. When you do come to your senses you may shout till you're tired—nobody will hear you. If you never speak again so much the better!"

These were rather thoughts than words as Brunton

hurried to and fro. He made fast the door of communication which closed with a spring—set open that which opened into the court, to give him a ray of light after he had extinguished his lamp—closed it again softly behind him when he stepped outside—noiselessly turned the key twice and put it into his pocket, and then stealthily threaded the alleys that conducted to the open streets.

Brunton lived in handsomely-furnished lodgings at the other end of the town, and there was still plenty of time before the latest train left London in the direction he intended to take. His passports were in his pocket, and an hour at home would be sufficient for him to pack up all he wanted for his journey: some valuables must be left behind—his horses were his chief regret—but a fugitive must make sacrifices; sometimes, even, when he is flying from justice!

Simply to leave England was not, however, Brunton's intention. He had already committed himself too far on Claribel's account to contemplate giving her up without another struggle. Dangerous as the step was, he resolved to return to the place where he had last seen her: the fascination of her presence was greater than his fear.

On his way homeward he was reminded of two things: the first was, that he had eaten nothing all day, —the second, that the most convenient place he could select for dining was some house in a neighbourhood where he was not known; and this last thought brought to his memory a person who, under existing circumstances, might probably be useful. That person was Mr. Hinkin.

At the bottom of the Haymarket, therefore, Brunton dismissed the cab which he had hired in the City, and went on foot to the den in Windmill-street, where, Mr. Hinkin had told him, he was always "to be heard of." That gentleman might have added "to be seen"—except when a difficulty got in the way—for he was the first person who caught Brunton's eye when he swun-

back the tap-room door and looked cautiously in. Mr. Hinkin's eye, which at the moment was curiously blackened—by the hand, very probably, of "brother-man," or, it may be, of "sister-woman"—caught that of Brunton with telegraphic celerity, a rapid wink intimated that all was right, and leaving his liquor unpaid for he followed his new patron into the street, and—still obedient to signals—ascended, after him, to the first floor of the establishment in which we originally found Mr. Hinkin in the society of Mr. Cutts.

Mr. Hinkin had not "himself" had "anything to speak of" since one o'clock that day, and therefore did not object to "partake" of "a glass of somethin'," while Brunton discussed a hasty meal.

He soon found that he was wanted for more than ordinary occasion, but that was quite agreeable to Mr. Hinkin if the party so requiring was in a condition to pay for his services and willing to requite them. It was nothing less than an abduction—perhaps a violent one—which the patron meditated, and fifty pounds "down," with fifty more when the job was done, was the price agreed on.

This little matter arranged, as briefly as might be, and Mr. Hinkin having promised to be at the Waterloo station at a given hour, Brunton left him to make his final preparations for flight.

It was a pity that Brunton *did* leave his trustworthy ally, for in that case his fidelity might not have been tempted. As it happened, however, Mr. Hinkin *was* exposed to temptation, and that after a very common fashion, by putting himself in the way of it. Brunton had not been gone more than five minutes, when who should enter the room but Mr. Thomas Cutts. Mutual delight was expressed at the meeting, and a social glass, which meant, of course, one apiece, was the consequence. Over that social glass Mr. Hinkin surrendered his trust.

He had just parted with the swell which it was Mr. C.

had interdoosed him to. What he wanted? Why, if his friend arsted him *as* a friend, he didn't mind unbuzzomin'. There was a lady in the case, which the swell wanted to inweagle, somewheres down in the country. It was *to be* a fifty-pun' job, but he hadn't touched a single mag yet. (Lying Mr. Hinkin, the bank-note is in your fob at this moment.) When did it come off? Oh, they was to leave town that night by the Sou'-Western Railway. Had Mr. Hinkin been down to Scotland Yard that day? Well, he never went anigh it—willingly, and didn't mind saying he hadn't. Had he read the evening paper? No: there were reasons for that, too. What did he think of this?

Mr. Cutts here took a fourth edition of the *Sun* from his pocket, and read the following paragraph:

"MYSTERIOUS AND ALARMING OCCURRENCE IN HIGH LIFE.—A report reached town this afternoon, which, we regret to say, we are not yet in a position either to confirm or deny, that a distinguished young nobleman, who formerly held a commission in one of the Cavalry regiments of the Household Brigade, and more recently represented the borough of W—— in Parliament, has lost his life in a murderous attack which was made upon him at a late hour last night, as his lordship was returning home to the family mansion, W—— Castle, situated about four miles from the romantic village of B——, in Hampshire. This distressing event is rendered doubly painful to the relatives and friends of the distinguished young nobleman, from the fact that his lordship's noble father, the Marquis of W——, died only the day before in the arms of his noble son.

"Since the above was written we have received an express from our own correspondent at B——, to say that the report of Lord H—— F——'s death is incorrect; but he has ascertained that his lordship was dangerously wounded by a pistol-ball, which, passing through the right *anti-brachium*, lodged in the obducent cartilages of his lordship's *sternum*. The murde

missile has, fortunately, been extracted, and hopes are entertained by the very skilful practitioner who performed the operation, that his lordship's life may, after all, be spared. Our correspondent adds, that a rumour prevails at B—— of a most singular discovery having been made only a few days before the decease of the late Marquis of W——, in consequence of which a very large sum of money and a considerable portion of the W—— estates accrue to a young lady of great beauty and accomplishments, whose recent *début* at the —— Theatre excited so remarkable a sensation in dramatic circles; and it is whispered that the preliminaries of a matrimonial alliance between Lord H—— F—— and his new-found relative were already on the *tapis* before this melancholy occurrence took place, his lordship having been an admirer of the talented young lady long before the nobility of her extraction was an authenticated fact. Our correspondent further informs us, in a postscript to his letter, that, although the ruffian who fired the shot which lodged in his lordship's *sternum* has not yet been arrested, great hopes are entertained that his capture will take place before many days are over, the county constabulary being on the scent. It is not, however, considered advisable to state the nature of the clue which they have obtained, as its premature publication would have a tendency to defeat the ends of justice. A reward of one hundred pounds has already been offered for the villain's apprehension, and it is considered very probable that a similar or even a larger sum will be added by the government, of which Lord H—— F—— was, in his legislative capacity, so strenuous a supporter."

"There!" said Mr. Cutts, when he had done reading. "What do you think of that?"

"Rayther a long-winded account of a werry small stroke of bisness," replied Mr. Hinkin, coolly. "I see nothin' in it 'cept the parrygraft about the reward."

"Don't you?" said Mr. Cutts. "But I do. The fact is, Hinkin"—he spoke impressively, but lowered his

voice, though there was nobody in the room but themselves—"the fact is, *all* those noble parties are noble relatives of mine."

Mr. Hinkin whistled in amazed incredulity, observing, "Why, I never know'd as you had any noble relatives!"

"Nor I, till this morning," returned Mr. Cutts, "but it's as true as Gospel."

"Well, and what then?" asked Mr. Hinkin.

"Don't you see that I am personally interested in discovering the assassin?"

"Oh, that's it. You want to finger the reward."

"No. In my present position I couldn't think of it. I leave that for you."

Mr. Hinkin's sound eye brightened up, but it was only for a second: his countenance fell again directly.

"I ain't a thief-taker, Mr. C.," he said; "and, what's more, I ain't on the lay."

"But if I put you on it," replied Mr. Cutts, "what do you say then?"

"Circumstances alters cases," observed Mr. Hinkin.

"Listen, then!"

Mr. Cutts put his mouth close to Mr. Hinkin's ear and whispered something.

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Mr. Hinkin, drawing a long breath. "What! HIM!"

"I can put two and two together," said Mr. Cutts, with a satisfied air.

"I believe you, Mr. C.," rejoined his friend.

The principle of the colloquy being settled, its practical result was only a matter of detail. Mr. Hinkin consented to lend his support to the law instead of assisting, still further, to outrage it; he also consented to take the larger sum of money and abandon the smaller.

On the other hand, it was agreed that Mr. Cutts, in close disguise, should proceed to Broadstone that night in the same train that conveyed Brunton and Mr. Hinkin, joining it at the Vauxhall station.

On looking at the clock, the upright colleagues found that there was just time for Mr. Hinkin to keep his promised appointment, and for Mr. Cutts to make his own arrangements.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AT CROSS PURPOSES.

It is time to throw a light on the catastrophe at Broadstone.

Brunton had levelled at the wrong man. The groom had fallen, but Lord Harry remained safe and sound. The poor fellow was carried, bleeding, into The Wheatsheaf, where his presence caused the greatest consternation.

It was at first supposed that Lord Harry had been shot as well as his servant, the report of a second pistol having been heard in the direction in which the horse he was driving had turned and galloped off; nor was the anxiety caused by his absence immediately relieved.

Meanwhile, the groom's condition demanded instant attention, and it fortunately happened that the medical man of the Broadstone Union was then in The Wheatsheaf, discussing a quiet glass with the landlord. On examination he found that the wound was serious, but what might be the result he would not undertake to say.

An event like this, occurring close to the inn, naturally disturbed all its inmates, and not the least anxious amongst the group that gathered round the wounded man was Dr. Brocas; but while he shared the general apprehension, he strictly enjoined every one present to make no mention of Lord Harry's name to either Claribel or Mrs. Basset. It was an excellent precaution, but

-ne that, of course, was not attended to—a frantic chambermaid immediately rushing off to tell the ladies.

"Oh, mum! oh, miss!" she exclaimed, bursting into their room, "such dredfle news! His lordship and his lordship's groom has both been barbariously murdered by a band of highwomen, and is now a-weltering in their gores and breathing their lasts down stairs!"

This version of the story imparted, the frantic chambermaid vanished as quickly as she came.

Loud were the exclamations of Mrs. Basset on hearing the startling intelligence, but Claribel was dumb with grief. Under any circumstances the shock would have been terrible, but the occurrences of the last few days had enabled her to form a truer appreciation of Lord Harry's character than she had ever arrived at before, and she now suddenly found that his claim upon her regard was not that of a friend alone.

Her stupor, however, was only for a moment, and she flew from the room to learn the truth of this fearful but incoherent tale. She was met in the hall by Dr. Brocas.

"Is it true—is it true," she cried, "that—Lord—Harry——" Her utterance failed her, but the question was written on her clay-cold features.

"Be calm, child, be calm," replied the old man—interjectionally devoting the person who had disobeyed his injunctions to all the infernal gods—"we have a wounded man here, that's all: but it's not Lord Harry."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Claribel; "but where is he? Is he not hurt? Tell me what has happened! Who is this wounded man?"

"That is all I can tell you at present," replied Dr. Brocas. "The sufferer is Lord Harry's groom. Not a hundred yards off—almost in front of the house—a pistol was fired, by whom nobody knows, and the consequence is what you hear."

Claribel looked wistfully in Dr. Brocas's face.

"Are you indeed telling me the whole truth? You know nothing more?"

"Nothing. I——" He stopped abruptly.

"For mercy's sake, where is he then? I am sure he is dead!"

"No, no, no! Come here, Mrs. Basset," he called, seeing Claribel's aunt approach; "take this poor child back to her room. I will follow directly."

Claribel suffered herself to be led away, and scarcely had she gone before Lord Harry drove up to the inn door, breathless with exertion, but altogether unhurt. His first inquiry was for his servant, who had been thrown out of the gig when the horse took fright, and greatly to his satisfaction he found him in the surgeon's hands, not dead as he feared, though suffering severely. The next question was concerning the assassin, but of him there were no tidings. For an instant, as the gig lamps flashed on the spot where he had planted himself, Lord Harry had seen a face which reminded him of somebody he had met before, but who the person was he strove in vain to bring to his recollection. Of this, however, he felt certain—that he should know the man if ever he saw him again.

"This is a sad affair," said Dr. Brocas, pressing Lord Harry's hand with affectionate warmth, "but we dreaded something much worse. I must leave you to remove the fears of your friends up-stairs, who have been alarmed by all kinds of sinister reports. But why should you not be the herald of your own return? Come with me."

Lord Harry's first impulse was compliance with his friend's request, but in the same moment he checked his desire.

"Not to-night," he said. "Be kind enough to express my best thanks to my cousin. I will wait on her —on you—in the morning. At present I must stay by this poor fellow: he may be worse than the doctor says. I shall sleep at the inn."

"Well, then, *à demain*," returned Dr. Brocas, as he

parted from Lord Harry, and went back to Claribel. He found her walking restlessly to and fro, impatient of the attempted consolation of Mrs. Basset. As he entered the room she ran towards him. He told her Lord Harry was safe, but she had seen the smile on his lips as he spoke, and before his words were uttered she had fainted.

"He had better have seen her to-night," said Dr. Brocas to himself; "his dreams would have been the brighter." Then aloud: "Poor thing! Take care of her, my Bassettini; she will be better alone with you. Quite well, I'll answer for it, to-morrow."

The morrow came, and with it the promised visit of Lord Harry.

He had a favourable report to give of the state of his wounded servant, but nothing to relate of the cause of the attempted murder. The search of the previous night had been useless, Brunton's *ruse* having led it in the wrong direction, and at length it was given up, the searchers dispersing, and each carrying home a contradictory account of what had happened.

For the first time since she had known him, there was marked embarrassment in the manner of Claribel's reception of her cousin. Dr. Brocas, who was closely observant, noticed this change: he also noticed that Lord Harry, who spoke of his immediate return to Wolverton Castle as absolutely necessary, still lingered without taking leave; and drawing his own inference from these facts, he easily devised an excuse for leaving them together.

There was silence for some moments after Dr. Brocas and Mrs. Basset had left the room. It was broken at length by Claribel.

"You were in great danger last night?" she said.

"Yes," he answered, "the escape was a narrow one; but after all—who knows—perhaps it would have been as well if I had not escaped."

Claribel looked at him reproachfully.

"Yes," he continued; "I have done so little good in this world that my absence from it would scarcely be missed. What is the difference, indeed, between death and perpetual absence?"

"I do not understand you."

"The case is very simple. Within the last day or two my position has greatly altered. As long as my father lived, I had many reasons for remaining in this country: those reasons exist no longer. As soon as the duties which have devolved upon me by my father's death are performed, I leave England for ever."

Claribel's eyes were cast down; she spoke without raising them.

"Do you think," she said, "that I can much rejoice in the possession of the fortune which, you said, Lord Wolverton had told you was mine, if by acquiring it I lose the only relation I have in the world—at least, the only one I know?"

"Ah!" said Lord Harry, with a sigh, "relations like myself are easily replaced. There are my brothers and sisters, as near to you in blood as I am—to say nothing of a host of far-off cousins."

Claribel sighed in her turn.

"But to all of them I am a perfect stranger. How will this high-placed kindred welcome one whose lot has been cast so differently from theirs?"

"Money, Claribel," said Lord Harry—"money reconciles all: neither can they deny your birth—of that there is ample proof."

"A welcome that way gained," she answered, "is to my thinking of little value. A simple word of unbought kindness is worth a thousand purchased smiles. But this is from the purpose. As one of your near relatives—as an old acquaintance—more—as a friend, I have some right—have I not—to ask you why you are going away?"

Lord Harry's face flushed red as scarlet. He could have given a prompt answer to any one but Claribel.

The death of Lord Wolverton had indeed left him a free agent, but it had left him the freedom of a penniless man,—penniless after he had satisfied his creditors. Vast wealth, on the other hand, had accrued to Claribel. His attentions while she was poor and unknown had been unmistakable, though unaccompanied by a declaration of love. Was he to tell her, now that her situation was reversed, when he knew her as nobly born as himself, and ten times richer than ever he hoped to be—that poverty and debt were the cause of the step he meditated? His pride prevented the explanation, and his sense of honour prohibited him, under such circumstances, to speak of love. It was this consideration which kept him tongue-tied on the preceding evening, when Brunton in his jealousy supposed him an accepted suitor; it was this consideration which kept him silent now.

"You do not answer me," said Claribel. "Yet I may be trusted."

There was a tone in Claribel's voice that thrilled through her lover's frame. Could it be that he was not indifferent to her? Did he learn that truth at a moment when honour forbade him to believe it?

"Claribel," he said, taking her hand, "I could trust you with——" he had almost said "my life"—"with anything but the knowledge of what you ask. You would hate me—despise me, if I told you. I dare not stay longer. Adieu." He raised her hand to his lips, detained it there an instant, and then was gone.

"He loves me!" said Claribel. "But that I knew before. And I—I love him too! But will he ever know it? Strange fate that brings us closer together to make our separation the wider."

At the opposite side of the room to that by which Lord Harry disappeared Dr. Brocas entered.

"Alone!" he exclaimed; "I left you with Lord Harry. I thought to have wished you joy!"

"Dear friend," replied Claribel, sadly, "I need your best advice. I am in trouble. Help me!"

Of the nature of Claribel's appeal something may be guessed; what ensued from it cannot, for the present, be disclosed.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MISTS CLEARING OFF.

As the herd, fitfully lowing, huddle together when the unseen storm hangs in the air, so, on the morning after Brunton's flight from London, were gathered muttering groups of men in the corners of commercial alleys, where brokers and bankers' clerks keep tryst and deal out ominous words of mercantile failure and disgrace.

That something had gone wrong in the City, that a great discovery was pending, none could doubt who noted with what compressed lip and quick glancing eyes the assembled knots listened to the half-whispered communications of those who were eager to tell the little they had heard, yet far from sure that even that little was true. It was enough that the great house of Temple Travers should be spoken of in conjunction with something extraordinary, to set conjunction afloat and give birth to the wildest surmises. Nor was the complexion of the surmises altered when the name of Richard Brunton became mixed up with the transaction, whatever it was, that made people question each other so eagerly.

At first, everything was loose and vague: some said that Temple Travers had met with losses which even their enormous wealth was insufficient to meet—others that Brunton and Co. had closed their doors and called

their creditors together—while others, again, went so far as to say that both the above-named houses had literally gone to smash. And amidst all these sinister reports there mingled something more sinister still, in which fraud and robbery, and even murder, were darkly hinted at.

By degrees, however, daylight broke on the apprehensions of 'Change-alley and Birchin-lane, and the distortions of rumour subsided to the semblance of truth —the truth which, at last, is always known.

The following facts were then ascertained: that by one of the most fortuitous occurrences that ever came to the assistance of "undoubted respectability,"—the house of Temple Travers had been accidentally put in possession of forged acceptances of theirs, not yet negotiated, to the amount of nearly a million sterling; that the forger of these bills was no other than the Millionaire of Mincing-lane, who had suddenly absconded, taking with him all the available assets of his firm;—and that Mr. Reuben Ashley, the eminent "Dealer" of Finsbury-circus, had been found dead on the floor of the room at the back of the counting-house of Brunton and Co., with no marks of violence on his body, but closely shut up between doors that were double-locked.

Here was enough for discussion, but there soon came more. It was ascertained that a cheque for two thousand pounds, drawn by Mr. Ashley in favour of Brunton and Co., had been cashed the day before; that as late as six o'clock on the same afternoon, Mr. Ashley had been seen to leave his house in company with Brunton; and that a passport in the name of the latter had been obtained at the Foreign-office and had received the *visa* of the Austrian Embassy; a combination of circumstances which perfectly satisfied the minds of Birchin-lane and 'Change-alley that—in their comprehensive phrase—"Brunton and Co. had murdered Mr. Ashley."

Even all this was not enough to fill the mouth of City gossip. The paragraph in the *Sun*, which has already

been brought to our notice, was freely quoted as one of the most refreshing incidents of the day, and coupled with its reproduction in all the morning papers, there came the report of another terrible disaster in the neighbourhood of the locality where the alleged outrage on Lord Harry FitzLupus had been committed, and which acquired additional zest from the fact that a conspicuous place in it was occupied by Richard Brunton.

The disaster referred to was this:

When the conference in Lillicrap's parlour broke up, on the preceding evening, Messrs. Cutts and Hinkin proceeded, as we have seen, in different directions. At the Waterloo station Mr. Hinkin met his principal, and when the train started they occupied a *coupé* to themselves, an arrangement which Brunton ensured the whole way to Broadstone by merely infringing the company's regulations to the extent of leaving half-a-crown in the way of the guard who locked up the carriage. At the Vauxhall station the train was joined by Mr. Cutts, dressed in a full-sleeved paletot and slouched wide-awake, and still further transmogrified by a large pair of blue spectacles, which latter ornament did not, however, prevent him from catching a glimpse of the corner of a red handkerchief, hanging from the window of the *coupé*, an assurance that Mr. Hinkin and Brunton were there. Warned off from that compartment, as well by his own inclination as by the conscientious guard, Mr. Cutts slipped into the first place he saw vacant, and the train was again in motion.

Having communicated to his companion as much more of his purpose as he thought necessary, Brunton confined his attention to his own immediate affairs. He had not yet had time to examine the pocket-book which he picked up when it fell from Mr. Ashley, but now he opened it, Mr. Hinkin having gone to repose, or appearing in a somnolent condition.

I baffled revenge in respect to the misdirected packet

could meet with compensation, Brunton found it in the papers which, one by one, he now unfolded. They constituted the bulk of Mr. Ashley's wealth, and consisted of a number of bills to a very large amount, some of which had reached maturity, while others had still to run. How far this property was available, under existing circumstances, was a question of which Brunton fully understood the difficulty; but that was what he thought least about, for, consider them how he might, he held in his grasp all the acceptances of Lord Harry FitzLupus which had passed into the hands of Mr. Ashley. They were an instrument of price whether Lord Harry were alive or dead; if dead, they should never return to Mr. Ashley, of whose fate Brunton was wholly ignorant; if living, Brunton, by their possession, became the arbiter of his rival's destiny.

These were pleasant thoughts on a midnight journey, with villanous wrong for its bourne and a hired ruffian to aid in perpetrating it, sitting by his side; but such as they were, they proved the last that Brunton had the power to control.

In an instant—no warning given—not a momentary deflection to make Mr. Hinkin raise the handkerchief from his eyes and seem to wake—not a sound in the air to herald the approaching doom—crash came the blow!

Shrieks, groans, curses, prayers, mingled in wild confusion, where, amid splintered fragments and crushed machinery, spattered with blood and seething with scalding steam, lay a heap of mutilated human beings.

The collision had taken place within a mile of the Broadstone station; a cattle train had caused the accident. To that no harm had been done; even the stoker and engine-driver had escaped unhurt; but the down-train was an utter wreck, and the amount of injury was fearful. Who amongst the passengers was killed, or who spared, was at first impossible to say. They were extricated as speedily as assistance could be summoned, and borne to the nearest houses; two of the number were

carried to The Wheatsheaf. These two were Brunton and Thomas Cutts; the latter roared terribly—the former scarcely breathed; as for Mr. Hinkin, it was useless to move him so far, he being past all human aid, and so flattened and battered that even the bank-note in his waistcoat-pocket was torn into a thousand shreds.

This was the catastrophe which had given the finishing touch to the excitement in Birchin-lane and 'Change-alley.

Once more the skill of the medical man of the Broadstone Union was appealed to.

He found, after a careful inspection, that Mr. Thomas Cutts had broken both his legs, and so awkwardly, that there was every prospect of his becoming a cripple for life. When he examined the injuries which Brunton had sustained, he shook his head, and pressed by Dr. Brocas, who had risen immediately the house was disturbed, admitted the case was hopeless: a few hours of unconscious life was all that could be expected.

As the people at The Wheatsheaf were unaware that either Brunton or Cutts were known there, no frantic chambermaid found pleasure in waking up Claribel and her aunt with frightful intelligence, and all they heard was that some sufferers from a railway accident had been brought to the house, which made it desirable that Dr. Brocas and his party should return to town.

But towards Lord Harry FitzLupus, who came over from Wolverton Castle, ostensibly—perhaps really—to see how his servant was getting on, the same reserve was not maintained.

Dr. Brocas, who had additional reasons, since his conversation with Claribel, for seeking the intimacy of Lord Harry, took him aside, as soon as he arrived, to tell him of the strange chance which brought the two sufferers under the same roof with themselves.

The surgeon's prediction had not been strictly verified. Complete consciousness was not restored, but towards the afternoon Brunton had spoken once or twice, and in the

words he uttered the surgeon fancied he detected more than the mere wanderings of a disturbed brain. It might be desirable that others should hear what he said, and he left the room in search of proper witnesses. On the threshold he met Lord Harry and Dr. Brocas, and together they returned with him.

Brunton was lying on the bed, a ghastly spectacle; his head bandaged, his eyes closed, and his features wearing the hue of death; alive, however, for his pale lips moved, and feeble sounds escaped them.

Noiselessly the three drew near the bed.

The first word that fell from Brunton startled Lord Harry as if the dead had spoken.

It was a woman's name.

"Claribel!" he muttered.

Lord Harry put aside the curtain, and, stooping down, gazed eagerly in Brunton's face, on which a ray of light now fell. When he looked up again, it would have been hard to say which was the paler of the two. He grasped Dr. Brocas's arm and whispered in his ear,

"That is the man who shot at me! I remember him now. I have seen him twice before."

Again Brunton spoke:

"Margaret!—Alice!" he said. "All gone! No hope! No life!"

There was a pause.

"Ashley, too! No! I left him alive. Where is Hinkin? That villain! Why don't he come to help me? She resists. I cannot force her away. Come, Claribel, you must—you must! It's of no use struggling! You shall never leave me. I have fortune—thousands—all shall be yours. What is that rushing sound? Over! Over! Light! Light! Darkness! Darkness!—Who calls? Who fired that pistol? He is dead—dead! I saw him fall—I have put him out of the way. No more of Lord Harry!"

Dr. Brocas, the surgeon, and Lord Harry looked at each other in speechless amazement. Brunton's hands

were in motion: he seemed to be feeling for something, and clutched the bedclothes convulsively.

"What has become of Ashley's pocket-book? I can't find it. Ah! here it is! One—two—three—four,—his name upon every one. All mine now! What would Lord Harry give to have these bills again? But he never can,—for—I killed him: killed him, for your sake, Claribel! And yet you hate me. O God!"

A throe of pain wrung from him this last exclamation. He opened his eyes and looked about him.

"Where am I? I don't know this place! Who are these people? What has happened?"

Dr. Brocas and Lord Harry drew back, while the surgeon answered:

"You have been hurt, sir," he said. "I am the doctor. You must not speak. You must keep quiet."

"Quiet,—ay,—I shall—soon—be quiet—enough. Who is that behind you?"

"Somebody you know, sir. Dr. Brocas."

"Dr. Bro—cas! *Her* friend! And the—the—other, there? That tall man?"

The surgeon hesitated to reply.

"I had better relieve his mind," whispered Lord Harry.

He stepped forward and took Brunton's passive hand.

"Look at me, sir," he said.

Brunton fixed his filmly eyes on the speaker. At last there came a gleam of intelligence.

"It is *his* face," he said, and shuddered. "Who has brought him back?"

"Compose yourself, sir," replied Lord Harry. "You did not injure me."

"Is that true—is that true?" exclaimed Brunton, anxiously. "But somebody fell."

"There was little harm done; that person is recovering."

Brunton heaved a deep sigh. "Thank God!" he said. "I am guiltless of shedding blood. Can you forgive the attempt?"

Lord Harry pressed Brunton's hand, but did not speak. His tears were falling fast.

"Ah!" said the dying man, "you weep for one who wronged you."

It cost him a great effort to speak again:

"Come closer," he said; "let no one hear me. I have—a sum of—money—in a pocket-book—in bills—those you gave to—Mr.—Ashley—and more. Tell nobody: destroy your own: they will set you free. Come nearer. Marry—Claribel! She loves you!"

Brunton's head fell back on his pillow.

At that moment a knock was heard at the door, and before any one could stir, it was opened. The surgeon raised his finger, to enjoin silence on the person who entered. He was a square-set, resolute-looking man.

"I must do my duty," he said. "I have a warrant for the apprehension of Richard Brunton."

"Hush!" cried the surgeon.

"Over! over!" murmured Brunton. "Light! light! Darkness!—darkness!—darkness!"

"Your warrant is useless now," said the surgeon, who had been bending over his patient. "Mr. Brunton is dead!"

"Of what was he accused?" asked Dr. Brocas.

"Of the robbery and murder of the late Mr. Reuben Ashley," replied the officer.

"Unhappy man!" said Lord Harry. "I fear the accusation is true, for the robbery was half admitted. He spoke of a pocket-book of Mr. Ashley's: it is most important it should be discovered."

"Here are his clothes," said the surgeon; "at least, what remains. Let the officer examine them."

The search was made, and besides some letters, a purse of gold, and a case filled with bank-notes, a pocket-book, marked with the letters R. A., was found.

"Let that be sealed up in the presence of these gentlemen," said Lord Harry. "We have nothing more to do here."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SUNSHINE.

THE London season was on the wane. Its flower-shows and bazaars, its Isthmian games and whitebait dinners, its operas and concerts, its French plays and popular preachers, had by turns exhausted the admiration and emptied the pockets of the fashionable multitude—all its busy idleness was over—and in a few days more Imperial Parliament itself would close its doors after the longest and most profitless session on record.

Pending this last event a few men still lingered in town, not on account of their official connexion with the state, but from the mere force of habit; as withered leaves cling to a stray bough long after the rest of the tree is stripped.

Amongst them were Lord Dangerfield and his set; Coates Taylor—Lord Tiplady—Sir John Peckover—Chichester Fleetwood—Phil Buckinger, and the Vicomte de Vaurien, whose name was a synonyme for the rest.

They were again assembled at dinner at Lord Dangerfield's, as we saw them once before, when the affairs of Lord Harry FitzLupus engaged their attention. Lord Harry's affairs—under a different aspect—occupied them now, but not exclusively.

"Have you heard Chichester's news?" asked Lord Dangerfield, addressing Sir John Peckover.

"No," replied Sir John, "what does he say?"

"He tells us that Fitz is booked at last."

"Who then has booked him? That Jew?" inquired the Vicomte.

"It's no Jew this time," said Chichester Fleetwood, "Harry has fallen into Christian hands."

"Our friend Crooky's, perhaps," bawled Phil Buckinger,—"out of the frying-pan, et cetera."

"Take care what you're about, Phil," said Mr. Coates Taylor, quietly, "or you may realise the proverb in your own person."

"But what is it?" repeated Sir John Peckover. "How much is he in for?"

"Some people say two hundred thousand," replied Chichester Fleetwood, gravely, "some say three; but the truth, as usual, lies between."

"*Diable!*" exclaimed De Vaurien, "that is what one may call debts! But it is magnificent so to enter a prison. *Ma foi*, he is to be envied!"

"He is, indeed, Adolphe," said Lord Dangerfield, "though you're off the scent entirely. Fitz is not going to quod as you suppose; he's to be married. His wife will be the only detaining creditor."

"So much the worse for him," growled Lord Tiplady; "she'll never let him go."

"Tip is right," observed the Vicomte. "His experience agrees with my philosophy. Marriage and a prison! Yes, they are the same! Is it that rich Miss?"

"You mean Miss Temple Travers? Oh, no—quite t'other, as Phil, there, would say. What do you think of the pretty actress, who turned out to be his own cousin—Wimple's great card, as he fancied?"

"Oh, I thought that was a *canard* of the newspapers."

"So far from being a *canard*, it is a goose with golden eggs."

"Don't deal in driblets," said Sir John Peckover; "tell us all about it, Chichester."

"Well, then," replied the gentleman addressed, "here it is:—Harry's affairs turned out a deuced deal better than he expected. Old Wolverton didn't cut him out as everybody said he would, but left him enough to pay all he owed."

That was a very miserable conclusion," said De Vaurien.

"But it was not the conclusion. His aunt, Lady Sheepskin, died too, and set him up again."

"Why, then, should he have married?" urged the Vicomte.

"Ah, why, indeed?" echoed Lord Tiplady.

"Simply because he was head over ears in love."

"To cure himself of love, truly, no other course could be taken."

"About that other girl," said Phil Buckinger—"the one Harry was after first—Miss What's-her-name?"

"Ah, yes! Speak of her—that rich Miss!"

"I'm afraid neither of you have a chance there," said Lord Dangerfield, laughing. "I happen to know the facts. I had them from Travers himself. It's another tale of true love, quite *selon les règles;* didn't go quite right at first, mightn't have gone right at all, but for what happened. Some bankrupt fellow in the City, staying in the same house with the girl, took and proposed to her, he being under a promise to the girl's governess. She fired up, told her father all about it; the fellow bolted, got killed somehow on a railway, the governess fell sick, a death-bed scene followed, and one way or other it came out that there was a young man in India, a Captain or Major Hastings, that Miss Travers had a liking for; he had distinguished himself greatly out there—much too long a story to tell—and so, at last, the father gave his consent—and that's where it is."

"An odd affair," said Phil Buckinger; "like the sort of thing you read of in a novel."

"Truth is stranger than fiction," observed Sir John Peckover; a sententious and novel remark which created a laugh at his expense.

"What was the fellow's name that caused the *esclandre?*" asked Chichester Fleetwood.

"Hang me if I remember," replied Lord Dangerfield; "but I dare say Crooky can tell you; he knows all those City men."

"It was Brunton," said Coates Taylor.

"Right," said Sir John Peckover, who prided himself on his criminal statistics, intending some day to take office as home secretary. "That's the man—Brunton—fraudulent bankrupt—robbed and murdered a Jew named Ashley."

"You're wrong there, Peckover. It was proved at the inquest that Ashley died of disease of the heart: sudden emotion did it. Brunton was bad enough in all conscience, but he didn't murder his friend."

"He had something to learn, then, this Brunton," said the Vicomte. "If he had lived in good society, he would not have made so great a mistake."

"And what does Harry mean to do when he is married?" inquired Lord Peckover. "I suppose we shall soon have him here again."

"I think not," said Chichester Fleetwood; "for he told me they were going to Italy, meaning to live there, if not altogether, at all events for some years."

"I'll take eight to one, in ponies, on a double event," cried Lord Tiplady. "He don't stay away a twelvemonth, and when he comes back it will be without his wife."

There were several takers of this offer, and to the business of making their books we leave Lord Dangerfield and his friends.

These gentlemen knew all that was going on in their own circle, and a little beyond it, but there were one or two things, affecting other persons who have been mentioned in these pages, with which, of course, they could not condescend to be acquainted. We must endeavour to supply their lack of information.

The succession to Mrs. Meggot's property was not determined so speedily as was anticipated: to tell the truth, it is not settled yet. The respective proctors of the Treasurer of St. Trephine's, of Mrs. Hornybeak, and of our good friend, John Basset, are still at it in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, bewildering the judge

and abusing each other daily, according to the invariable practice of proctors; and the probability is that this sport will not cease so long as the contesting parties are willing to pay for keeping up the game.

But the result is now of no consequence to the little watchmaker, for Claribel's first care, on succeeding to her fortune, was to provide liberally for her relations. To each of her aunts she gave the sum of five thousand pounds. Mr. Basset gave up his business at Brompton and retired with his wife to her native place, where they live very comfortably in the house that was her father's.

Mr. and Mrs. Cutts also relinquished their occupations in Mayfair, and following the bent of their inclinations transferred themselves to Boulogne-sur-Mer, where they set up a boarding-house which is likely to be one of the lions of that agreeable watering-place. Mrs. Cutts already makes a sensation at the head of her table, decked like the rainbow, blazing with *rouge*, and shining in French conversation. Mr. Cutts, who is lame—both legs obeying the same curve—is not so brilliant, perhaps, as his helpmate—but he is quite as useful in the establishment. His "grand ordinaire," which, he says, he ships himself from Bordeaux, pays him two or three hundred per cent.—he does quite as well with his "vins de première qualité," and a great deal better with the knowledge he had already acquired, and has since perfected, of the pleasant and profitable game of *écarté*.

Mr. Julius Browser was not, after all, a loser by Brunton's failure; the house—or rather the old Mr. Travers—making good the amount he had lent to the defaulting Millionaire. Mr. Velters is still an oracle, and Mrs. Velters as great a bore as ever.

And what of Dr. Brocas?

Lord Harry FitzLupus owns that he owes everything in the world to the learned civilian, and Claribel, smiling, says the same. The consequence is that Dr. Brocas now

es in a charming villa in the most sheltered part of e beautiful Bay of Spezzia, and there he means to end s days.

There is only one thing likely to disturb the serenity his evening of life—he finds it impossible to get into ebt.

THE END.

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